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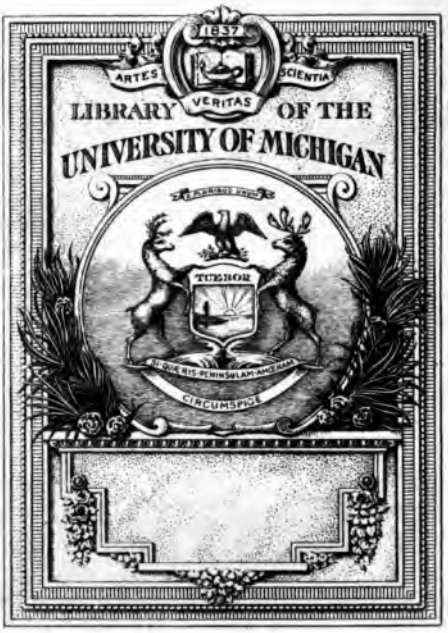
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MILLIONS

By ERNEST POOLE

Blind
His Family
The Harbor
Beggars' Gold
His Second Wife
"The Dark People"
The Village: Russian Impressions

MILLIONS

BY

ERNEST POOLE

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1922

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Set up and electrotyped. Published September, 1922.

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Rhet.
11-1-1922

Press of
J. J. Little & Ives Company
New York, U. S. A.

To M. A.

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MILLIONS

CHAPTER I

I

MADGE CABLE came out of her brother's room, went slowly to a chair and sat down. In her small determined mouth and her steady grey-blue eyes was a look of rigid composure which had nothing to do with the case. She felt numb and frightened, strange.

"What shall I do?" she asked herself. "Suppose that he should die to-night?"

The November dusk made the living room of her brother's apartment dim and unreal. She had never been here till this afternoon. She still wore her brown travelling suit, and her cloak and bag were by the door. It was Sunday. Late the night before, Gordon Cable had been hurt in an accident in his automobile. His partner had telegraphed to the dull small town where his sister lived, up near Albany, on the West Shore; and she had taken the next train. Nobody had met her

in New York, and on reaching the Park Avenue apartment a few minutes ago she had found no one here but an old colored man and a smart-looking pretty young nurse. She had gone at once into Gordon's room, and had thought at first that he was dead. In a low voice she had questioned the nurse. A blow on the head—concussion—coma. He lay lifeless as a log. A lean, tall man of thirty-six, his face with its large mouth and nose, gay humorous attractive eyes, had been magnetic and full of life, only a few hours before. But now all that was swept away, and beneath the bandage around his head his features showed thin, white and gaunt. The eyes were closed. It was touch and go. At least he was not suffering. There was nothing to do but wait.

In the front room, in the deepening dusk, she sat without stirring for some time. Her principal feeling was not of grief. She was sorry for her brother, of course, and shocked and stunned by the disaster; but for years he had barely seen her or even taken the trouble to write—though he must have known how poor she was, and the dull monotonous life she led. What overwhelmed her now was this. In the autumn of 1917, before he went over to France in the army, Gordon had

written a letter to Madge in which he said that he had left her everything in case he were killed. He had not been a rich man then, but now he was worth millions—and in a few hours he might be dead!

With a sudden icy cold sensation of excitement, she clenched together her small hands. Still sitting motionless, she thought,

"I'm not going to think of that! He'll live—of course! He's got to!"

Determinedly she turned from the present and forced her thinking back and back into his distant early life and her own, in the small town up near Albany. And as she thought of those early days, the tears came quickly in her eyes.

2

In a lovely old house looking down on the Hudson out of its birches and big pines, they had grown up together. Though he was four years older, a quick tempered little lad forever getting into fights and into mischief of all kinds, he was gruffly patient and kind with her. She was chubby and round and neat as a pin, from her pig tails to her stubby brown shoes. She adored her big brother and scolded him, with large clumsy stitches she mended his clothes,

made him read to her and tell her stories, up in the attic on rainy days, and "dress up" with her and be "a knight errant noble and true," when he wanted to be Pirate Bill. She made him "run away from home forever," down the wooded river bank to their "galleon" in the river. And when the old rowboat, still tied to the pier, had been poled a few feet out into the stream, and he asked, "Now what'll we do?" —she answered placidly, folding her hands, "Live happy ever after, of course."

As time went on, growing less romantic, she made him teach her to row and swim; and they fished in the river, and they made long slow excursions at a jog, both of them on one fat pony, back into the wooded hills. At such times she stoutly declined to become one half of a cavalry charge, and she grew to detest the very name of Morgan and his raiders. She argued to the point of tears with Gordon about the Civil War.

"Dad was a Virginian and I'm a rebel still!" he would cry.

Their father, having come up north with Gordon and his mother, after her death had married again; and Madge, the child of the second marriage, in vain appealed to Gordy to love her mother.

"That Yank?" he would say, in a quivering voice. "I hate her, Madge!"

And nothing could change him. When his stepmother tried to be kind, he was cool; and when she tried to discipline, he would glare at her and leave the house. Often he would go and stay with his Aunt Abby Dwight for weeks at a time. He kept away from home more and more, as he grew into his teens; and before he was twenty he went to New York. Madge barely saw him after that. As she grew older she was told that he was getting on splendidly, in a business which had to do with ships; but except for an occasional letter, and a gift at Christmas, he showed no interest in her life.

Their father, in the meantime, had put every dollar belonging to his second wife into a stud farm, near their home. He loved fine horses and he liked to take Madge about with him on the farm, or for rides far up the river to a favorite sandy point of theirs, where they would cook supper in the dusk and then ride home by moonlight. An easy-going, lovable man—but he had no business head; and he managed the farm so badly that he was in debt at the time of his death. Madge and her mother went through some hard times; and when a few years later Mrs. Cable suddenly died, the house was so

heavily mortgaged that, taking her Uncle Phil Cable's advice, Madge made up her mind to sell it.

It seemed to her in the next few years that she was making a splendid start. She lived with her Uncle Phil at first and then went to a business college in Troy. For deep down in Madge was that secret spring of hopes and dreams which is in every American breast—though often it is buried by hard realities so deep as to be no longer known, even to its possessor—the hope of becoming Somebody, the dream of becoming rich and great. And her brother's example was always before her. She was proud of Gordon's success, in spite of his neglect of her, and she felt she had the same business instinct.

"If he can do it, why can't I?"

The Woman's Movement was then in the air, and she applied it to her own life. She did not care very much for the Vote, but the idea of earning her way as a business woman appealed to her. Her friends made fun of it at first. She was bright enough, but so very small—"about the size of a peanut," they said—and so altogether feminine; she had such lovely soft brown hair, she did so love a pretty gown; and at dances she invariably had some man waiting to see her home. But in spite of this she kept to her plan. On coming back to Halesburg she

had promptly taken a job in Hale and Pritchett's Emporium. It was a drowsy old concern, but her business instincts were stirred by the thought of gradually building it up into a real department store. The town at that time showed some signs of waking up from its long sleep. The wholesale houses sent in their men, and Madge grew absorbed in studying the many possibilities. The changing styles from year to year took hold of her imagination. Her employers listened to her plans, raised her salary every year and gave her hopes that soon she would be one of the firm. She did not stop to consider that this might be on her brother's account, and the prospect of his backing. She put it down to her own hard work and enterprise.

About five years went quickly by; and by 1917, when she was twenty-seven, she had become cashier in the store and was earning twenty-two dollars a week.

Then the Great War came to America; and Madge went into the Red Cross. It was soon after this that she heard from her brother—after a lapse of several years. Though she knew that since the war began he had been making money fast with a score of old vessels which he bought just before the prices soared, Gordon had not written her once.

But he joined up now as a volunteer, and a few months later, before he sailed, he wrote her a letter in which he said,

"I have been a pretty poor brother, Madge. You did not seem to need me and we just somehow got apart. But I want you to know that in case the Fritzies get me I have left you what I have—and I want you to write to me if you will. It's good to feel there's somebody at home."

Back with a rush came her old affection. She wrote to Gordon often, though he barely ever replied; and she spoke of him to her friends, and even confided to a few what he had said in that letter of his. The story spread all over town that if Gordon was killed Madge would be rich, and she soon felt her importance rise. She worked day and night at her war job, and within a year she was at the head of the local Red Cross activities.

But this was the height of her early rise. For though after the war her old firm took her back, it was soon plainly hinted that if she expected further advance her brother's support must be forthcoming.

There followed some grim months for Madge. She would not ask her brother to help her. Though he had been home from France for months, he had not taken the trouble to see her or even ask her

down to New York; he had merely written her that he was back. And deeply hurt at his neglect—after all those letters she had written him in France, and after all they had meant to each other in the years when they were small—she would not ask him for his aid.

Her sense of injustice was soon increased by the news of his prosperity, for Gordon was piling up money now at a perfectly fabulous speed. At least so it was rumored at home, for citizens of Halesburg went to New York and brought back tales of his imposing offices and the business he was doing in the boom which followed the war. The next autumn he wrote again to Madge, to ask if he could not help her; but he did not invite her down to New York, nor did he come to see her. And so she replied,

"No, thank you, Gordon, I am doing quite well as I am."

But she was not doing well at all. The mere idea that all that rapid rise of hers in Hale and Pritchett's drygoods store, had been due to the prospect of his support and not to her own abilities, first angered her and then by degrees it sapped her self-reliance. So she stayed at the cashier's desk; and in the months and years which followed, that sense

of her own limitations began in her and steadily grew. It came not only from the difference in her position at the store; her position in the life of the town had changed as well. Those women—and they were not a few—who had been jealous of her rise to such prominence during the war, now smiled at her rich brother's neglect and at the very apparent collapse of her grand dreams for a business career. They soon "made her feel her place." And though she still held high her head, in the face of their mute derision, the effect of all this cut very deep.

Three years went by, and at thirty-two she found herself, with a school teacher friend, Amanda Berry, living in a little flat up over a small furniture store, with steep varnished stairs leading up to their door. And she saw no other home ahead. One by one in the last ten years her men friends had dropped away. With Amanda she still went to parties and church sociables, but the men she met were either hopelessly settled for life or else they seemed to her mere boys. She had taught them once in Sunday School.

The events of her daily existence, however, interested her keenly at times, for she was alert and observant still, and with sharp humor from her niche she looked out on this queer world of to-day,

which even in Halesburg was now filled with such swiftly changing lives. For the telephones and the automobiles, the Sunday papers and picture shows, had all been pouring into the town a restless deepening fever of change. Old ways and standards dropped behind. Aunt Abby Dwight had been a minister's wife. Her son Ray worked in a garage and went to the movies on Sunday night. Madge herself had left behind the lovely old home on the river bank, and often now it seemed to her as though she were merely camping out, in this cheap flat with its varnished stairs—she felt herself betwixt and between.

To what was she going? "Well, we'll see." She faced the future without dismay, nursed her independence and kept her feelings to herself—all kinds of feelings—some of them quite old and familiar, so that she understood them well; others new to her and disturbing, having to do with babies, men. They had come since the collapse of her vision of a career, and were not to be faced but to be kept down, even with Amanda Berry, though they had long talks about everything else, considered themselves very modern indeed, and would have laughed if anyone had told them they were Puritans.

They still got a good deal of fun out of each

day's existence, and they smiled to one another over the way in which they were slowly being forced by the life of the town into corners—as mere spinsters. For they knew that it would not be so. Spinsters? Yes. But corners? No! They still took pains about their clothes; and Amanda, who had worked for Hoover, had applied for jobs for them both in the work of European relief. Oh, no, they were not beaten yet!

Amanda was a big-boned creature of thirty-five, goodnatured and kind, with a rich easy laugh which hid a decided mind of her own. Madge was a slender little thing with a good figure, thin resolute lips and blue-grey eyes set wide apart, and she still had lovely hair. But in spite of that her appearance was becoming rather prim—and this to a very large degree was caused by the mask of composure, almost severe, with which she had hidden her feelings since the turn of her career, and which she assumed unconsciously whenever she was excited, disturbed, uncertain of herself or afraid.

3

And with all these emotions now—here in New York, in her brother's apartment—she sat perfectly still, with her thin lips half parted, then compressed

again. She was frowning slightly—overwhelmed. To be wrenched away from her corner and dropped so suddenly into this! She wished that her Uncle Phil had come with her. Before leaving home she had just had time to telephone and give him the news. He had gone with her to the train and had said that he would telegraph the time of her arrival to Gordon's partner in New York. But Mr. Evans had not been here.

In a few moments Madge looked up with a characteristic quick slight turn of her small head. The nurse had come out of Gordon's room.

"I can leave him now for a minute," she said. "Is there anything that I can do?"

As she spoke, Madge felt the bright curious eyes of the pretty young New Yorker taking in every detail of her clothes, taking her measure generally.

"No, thank you." Her low clear enunciation had a distinctive quality which drew a little look from the nurse. But she was quite used to that. People so often noticed it. Her thoughts returned to her brother's partner.

"Has Mr. Evans been here?" she asked.

"Not since early this morning."

Madge gave a slight frown of surprise.

"Not since then?"

"Oh, he has been calling up, about every hour or so. But there wasn't anything he could do—and he told me that his business would keep him at the office all day."

"Sunday?"

The young nurse smiled at that.

"He told me that your brother and he had been rushed to death with work all week. Mr. Evans looks half sick himself." She paused, but Madge said nothing. "He said you were to have his room. He lives here with your brother, you know."

"I see."

"Shall I show you which it is? I think dinner will be ready soon," she said; and a glance of impatience seemed to add, "Look here, this is your affair—you ought to be taking charge, you know."

"Thank you," said Madge. She hesitated. "What is your name?"

"Cochran."

"I see. Now if you will show me the room——"

And there, when she was left alone, she began methodically to unpack her suit case. But as she moved about the room she stopped all at once with a slight start. Between the bureau and the desk was a wide low window. The shade was up, and the view down into the sparkling night made her

draw in her breath with a gasp. She drew nearer and stood staring down—here into shadowy regions and there into regions bathed in light. The very clouds which rolled above were rosy and warm, and the whole weird vault of the heavens seemed to quiver from the glow of the numberless human lives beneath. On the train that afternoon, the thought had come to her, "If he dies, I suppose I'll stay in New York. I'll have to, for a time at least." The idea came to her now again, and with it rose the memory of the letter he had written her just before he sailed for France. With a kind of a pang, she thought, "He doesn't really care for me. I mean little or nothing to him any more. It may even have slipped his mind that he ever wrote such a letter at all, or made such a will. Yet now if he dies——" Her lips closed tight, almost with pain. "Oh, it's funny—funny!"

Staring down into the city night, she saw a new world waiting there—disturbing, strange, exciting. Something dynamic within herself leaped up in response. "Millions! What would I do with it?" Slowly she turned to her travelling bag and went on unpacking; but as she put some things on the bureau, the sight of her face in the mirror made her stop and stare again. "Quite a change in your life, young

woman!" She finished putting away her things, slowly tidied her beautiful hair, and then went in to supper.

She found Miss Cochran waiting.

"The night nurse has just come," she said, as though in excuse for being there.

"I see," said Madge. To herself she thought, "Two nurses. Yes, I suppose they do have two—when a man is rich as Gordon is." There were two places set at the table. Madge took one, and the nurse the other. "Now I wonder," Madge was asking herself, "whether she'd come to meals like this if I were a New Yorker? Would she if I were Gordon's wife? Or is it because she has put me down as a little gawk from a small town who wouldn't know about such things?"

During the meal they were silent at first, for Madge felt awkward and ill at ease. It was all so different here. Although she had taken no lunch that day, she did not feel like eating now; but she did so, mechanically. At home she had always gone to her uncle's for a cold supper on Sunday night, at six o'clock, before going to church. Here was a regular dinner instead—a real man's meal, with several courses, served by the old colored man, who wore a crisp white jacket now. She wondered if he

cooked as well. As the meal progressed, she guessed that he did. "And he probably does the marketing, too." The way he served, and the various dishes, the linen and the silver gleaming on the sideboard, the decanter half filled with whiskey there, all began to attract her attention. But all the time she was conscious of an effort to keep Miss Cochran from seeing how new it was to her. From behind her mask of composure, she threw a look of dislike at the girl, whose very obvious appetite was a jar at a time like this. Suddenly all Madge's thoughts went back to her brother. Abruptly she spoke, in her low clear voice:

"Will the doctor come again to-night?"

"No—he was here this afternoon—just a few minutes before you arrived."

"What did you say his name was?"

"Hoyt. He's a wonderful surgeon—one of the best of the younger men." And the nurse went on to tell of his marvellous record in France, where she had worked with him during the war. Madge listened, impassive. The nurse was more than pretty; she looked really able and smart, and she had small clever hands. Madge had a habit of noticing hands. "Clever—yes—but so cheerful!" she thought, with a return of her dislike. But she dismissed it. "Well,

why not?" she asked herself. "What is Gordon to her? A stranger, that's all. And when you come to think of it, he's little more than that to me." In a flash a picture came of the gaunt white figure in the next room, and her lips set hard. "Poor Gordon!"

Then by degrees her attention came back to the nurse, who was talking on, and she watched her again attentively. The girl was a blonde; her glossy hair had been bobbed and curled by a coiffeur, and her pretty face was plump and sleek. "I'll bet she's every bit my age. How young looking these women here manage to keep themselves," thought Madge. "I wonder how they do it?" And looking down at her plate she added, "My salary at home is probably just the same as hers—or maybe less. Yet now —in a few hours——"

Angrily she dismissed the idea, kept down the rush of excitement, and forced herself to listen. The nurse was still speaking of Doctor Hoyt.

"It's a great comfort to have him on a case like this," she said. "You can leave it all in his hands absolutely, and know that the best is being done."

"Yes," said Madge. "That's it," she thought, "there's really nothing for me to decide." The knowledge brought a sense of relief and then again that numb sensation, as though she were passively

drifting on to some tremendous change in her life. As to the event which would cause it all, in the cool dim room close by, the nurse seemed to have made up her mind; for by her inquisitive questions now she was plainly trying to find out what other relatives Gordon had, who might take charge when the crisis came. Madge's answers became brief. "It's none of her business, what I was—or what I am or am going to be!" Besides, the meal was at an end. The old colored servant came to her chair, and in a solicitous tone he asked,

"Will you-all have you' coffee heah, or in the othah room, Miss Cable?"

"Here," said Madge. The old man's deference went into her with a little thrill. It was so very new to her. And she noticed now that Miss Cochran, having fully sized her up, was taking the same deferential tone.

"Is there anything at all that I can do before I go?" she asked, as she rose from the table. With a slight turn of her small head, Madge inquired,

"Oh—are you going?"

"Yes, for the night. There's no need of my staying, you know, with the night nurse here. Her name is Miss Field. Would you like to see her?"

"Yes——"

"Shall I ask her to come out?"

"No—I'll be in there pretty soon."

The nurse went into the sickroom, and presently Madge could hear her talking in a brisk vivacious voice while she moved about changing her clothes. What business had she talking like that, in a sick-room? Now she was telling the other nurse that she was going with some man to the movies and later to a café, to dance. The angry tears came in Madge's eyes. She asked, "Is there no one who cares about Gordon? Hasn't he anyone at all who is anxious and unhappy to-night?" She felt a rush of pity and of indignation. There came a sudden memory of a day on the river long ago when he had a cramp and just in time she threw him a rope from the end of a pier. "I'm here to see that he lives!" she thought. "I tell you he's going to pull through!" With a constriction in her throat, she rose to go in and stop that talking! But just as she did so, Miss Cochran came out, fresh, trim and gay, for her evening.

"Good night, Miss Cable," she said, brightly. "I hope your brother does finely to-night."

"Thank you. Good night."

At her curt tone, she caught a look of surprise from the nurse, but she went on into Gordon's room.

The room was cool and dim as before, and he

looked like a dead man there. The night nurse sat reading the chart. Miss Field was a woman of middle age, rather stout, and she wore glasses over quiet keen grey eyes. She did not notice Madge by the door. Presently she went to the bed and took his pulse and his respiration. After that she stood for a moment looking intently down at his face. As she moved away, she caught sight of Madge.

"Good evening," she said, pleasantly. She did not lower her natural voice, and again Madge felt a shock of surprise.

"Good evening," she answered, in a voice which was almost a whisper. The older woman smiled and said,

"There's no need of speaking so low, Miss Cable. Your poor brother couldn't hear if we shouted." As she spoke, she went to the chart on the table and entered the observations she'd made. "His condition seems about the same as it was when I left this morning," she said. "The doctor can't be certain yet whether it's concussion or compression," she went on.

"Compression? What do you mean by that?"

"Well, it's a good deal more serious. If it's that, they may have to operate." Miss Field went on to give details. "There's nothing to do but wait," she

ended. "I'll do everything to-night—so I'd try not to worry if I were you." Madge had seated herself by the window. The older woman looked at her and asked, "Hadn't you better get some rest? I'll call you if there's any change—and of course I can always reach the doctor any minute on the 'phone."

"Very well," Madge answered, "if you'll be sure to call me."

No, there was nothing to do but wait. She went back into the living room; and after sitting there a while her alert observant eyes began to notice things in the room—rugs, curtains, heavy leather chairs, pictures, books and magazines, the Sunday papers, a piano. She went and began to look over the music. She had always loved good music. She played the piano rather well and prided herself on keeping in touch with the latest news in the music world. Here she found a conglomeration of Debussy, Grieg and jazz. Who was it that played, she wondered—Gordon or his partner? Or had there been somebody else? Suddenly she noticed a large photograph of a gorgeous creature with dark hair and lustrous eyes. She frowned.

"Now who is she?"

She came close and looked attentively at the big

gay challenging eyes. A signature was scrawled below, but she could not make it out. She had not thought of his women friends. What had happened in this room, she asked, what kind of people had been here? Just for a moment, with a rush, there poured into her a sense of warm pulsing joyous life —it seemed almost to be here still! With a rising curiosity, which she welcomed as a relief from her mood of a few minutes before, she went into the small study adjoining and glanced at some of the books on the shelves, at the pictures of ships upon the walls and a poster of a group of gunners shooting at a U-Boat. On her brother's table desk were some letters and a telegram. Should she open them? No, she decided. She came back into the other room and again began to look about, but could get no sense of what had been here. Home? It was no more a home than her own small cheap apartment. Just a place betwixt and between. Two men had lived here for a time—lived warm, lavish, careless lives. And both were utter strangers.

In her keyed up condition seeking desperately for ties to bring Gordon closer to herself, again there came a memory, from more than twenty years ago, of another Sunday evening. Their parents had gone off to church, and Gordon and she had slipped out

of bed and scampered down the high wooded bank to the river. It was an August night. How cool and soft the water had felt to their feet as they waded along the shore, thrilled by the adventure. Then she had suddenly been afraid, and had scampered up and back to the house.

Once more a wave of compassion for her half-brother swept over her now, but it was followed quickly by a feeling of dismay and of utter loneliness. "I'm not needed now, but the moment he dies I'll have to take charge—of everything!" Abruptly, almost fiercely, she turned her thoughts away from that. "Now we're not to be morbid!" And sitting there, she grew numb again. But presently she found her thoughts turning to the future. "If I had all that money, what would I do? How would I live?" By degrees from her subconscious depths, where they had long been buried, up came the ardent hopes and dreams and tingling desires. So much she had wanted to do and be! Life? It would be just beginning!

With a queer strained little laugh, Madge rose from her seat and walked the room. Again she forced herself to be sane, but again the thoughts came crowding in. She had often dreamed of the One Great Chance which would suddenly come to

her. But to have it come in *this* way—in *this* way! It was ghastly!

"I don't want it! He'll live, I tell you! He's not going to die to-night!"

4

She heard a key turning in the door, looked around with a startled jerk of her head and then stood waiting. A man came into the hall outside and took off his hat and coat. Then he loomed in the doorway, tall, heavy shouldered, still rather young, with a blunt heavy anxious face and appealing boyish eyes. When he saw her, he smiled and said, in a soft Southern voice,

"I reckon you are Gordon's sister."

"Yes——"

"I'm Joe Evans. Howdado. Gordon's partner, you know." He came in and took her hand. "I'm right glad you're here, Miss Cable. How is he now?" he asked her.

"No worse, they say."

She saw a slight quiver come on his lips. His mouth was heavy but sensitive. Abruptly he turned away from her with a little gesture of his hands, and she darted a quick look at them. They were so big and clumsy, helpless. In a moment he recovered himself.

"I'm right sorry I couldn't be here when you came, but I jest couldn't manage to get away from the office," he said. "Things have been piling up on us there till a man can't call his soul his own. These are right ticklish times, you know. And now with Gordon out of it——" he stopped, and added softly, "I sure am glad that you are here."

She smiled back at him pityingly.

"We'll do the best we can," she said.

He began to tell her now what he had done the night before—of the trouble he'd had at that hour of night in finding out about a good surgeon and getting him here, in getting a nurse, in deciding upon whether or not to take Gordon to a hospital. As he talked on, he would stop and frown and try to remember what else there was that she ought to know. As she listened, quite unconsciously Madge was smiling slightly still, feeling with a little glow that here was something she could do. For she saw that like herself he had been desperately alone in this, and that now he wanted to be reassured and praised a bit for what he had done.

"It seems to me quite wonderful," she told him, "how you've managed it all."

As she went on, in a quiet tone, she satisfied both him and herself that everything possible had been

done; and in the relief that came to them, they felt drawn to one another.

Joe Evans sank into a big leather chair.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" he asked her.

"No," she said.

He took out some tobacco and began to roll a cigarette. With his mind still on the disaster, he told what the surgeon had said of the case. Again feeling he wished to be reassured, she played her part; and with a feeling half of dismay she saw how he deferred to her. Plainly he was putting all responsibility on herself. He showed he felt he could count on her. And so few people had treated her like that, in these last years. The dismay soon left her and she felt a return of her old self confidence. She began to learn more about him now, though they were talking of Gordon still. As he spoke of how for the last few weeks they had been working day and night, her eyes went to the piano and the large photograph of the girl. Madge wanted to ask whose friend the girl was—but instead of that she inquired,

"How long have you known my brother?"

"Why—about five years, I reckon. We got together over in France. Both in the same regiment. We sure did have some scrumptious times."

"But how did you ever happen," she asked, "to be in the same regiment? You're a Southerner, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said, "I was born in Tennessee—and then went out to Texas. But when we-all went into the war I was in New York on some business—so I signed up for Plattsburg here." He went on to speak of his meeting with Gordon and of their life together in France. "You wouldn't think to look at him that he was such a real he man—but Lordy Hallelujah, how he could drive a lot of men. It's the same way in his business."

"Have you been his partner long?"

"No, only a little over a year—but we've been livin' together ever since we got our discharge. He took me into his office then and gave me a right speedy education in finance. He had an idea I'd helped him some, one night when he got hit in France—but what I did was nothin' at all when you think what he has done for me. I owe him jest everything," said Joe, and he went on to give details.

But Madge paid slight heed to that. Her attention was drawn to his hands and his eyes. Again she felt what a strain he'd been through and his relief to have her here, his awakening interest in her-

self. He began to ask her questions now. Apparently Gordon had told him little or nothing about his family; and as Madge began to explain, she could feel by his questions how he wished to have Gordon excused for neglecting her. So she made it appear quite natural.

"You see," she said, "we're Southerners, too—or at least our father was. Poor Dad was a little boy in Virginia during the Civil War—and his family lost everything—and after some terribly difficult times at last he came up north with his wife and Gordon, who had just been born. A little later his wife died—and then my father married again—*my* mother, you see—and I was born in Mother's old home." In an eager tone she described the house, and she could feel him listen intently. She spoke of the good times they had had, then told of "poor Gordon's trouble at home" and of how at last he had gone away. She said nothing of his neglect of her since, or the lean years she had been through, but dwelt instead on his Christmas gifts and the times when he had offered his aid. "But I wanted to make my own way, you see. So we just naturally drifted apart."

There was a moment's silence.

"Well," said Joe, "he's a lucky man to have

a little sister still—to call on at a time like this."

"Oh, I'm afraid I can't be of much use, but I'm glad you sent for me," she said.

She could see he was thinking of leaving now, and she dreaded being left alone.

"It's funny, isn't it," she remarked, "how most of us Americans seem to be just drifting around. Our family was in Virginia for about two hundred years. Then all of a sudden Dad comes north—and later Gordon comes to New York—and from there he goes to France—and meets you there—from Texas —and you were born in Tennessee." She broke off with a little laugh.

"Yes—we sure do move," he said. "I haven't been home in over ten years. My mother died when I was knee high, and my dad when I was in college."

"Haven't you any brothers and sisters?"

"No—and I've just been wanderin' 'round."

"Well, I can't say I've wandered much," she told him, with a rueful smile, "I've stuck right there in Halesburg. But the only home I ever had is gone, so far as I'm concerned—and so much has gone with it, too—and I don't suppose it'll ever come back. . . . And just what's to take its place I can't for the life of me see. Can you? I wonder what

we're headed for? It—rather brings you up with a jerk and sets you thinking—a time like this——"

Their thoughts returned to this grim night.

"Yes," he said. "It does do that. . . . I guess I'll go in and see him now—if you don't mind, Miss Cable."

"Please!"

And when he was gone she told herself, "Now I hope he didn't think that I was trying to keep him here!" But when he came out of Gordon's room, there was no thought of her in his anxious eyes.

"Is there nobody else," he asked, "who ought to be told?"

"No, our folks are pretty well scattered," she replied, "all but Aunt Abby and Uncle Phil—and he will be here to-morrow, I think."

"That's good." He hesitated. "Don't you want me to stay and jest sit here to-night—so you can get some rest?" he inquired.

"No, don't do that. You look tired," she said, "and there's nothing at all you can do. I expect to go to bed, myself. The nurse has promised to call me, of course, if there's any need."

"Is everything all right," he asked, "about your room and so on?"

"Oh, yes, thank you——"

"I didn't have time to come back, you see—but I 'phoned old Abe, our nigger, to tidy up—and I hope he did."

He rang for the old negro, then went and looked into his room, now hers. She followed behind him.

"Oh, I'll be quite comfortable. What a wonderful view you have," she said. He turned at that.

"Do you like it, too?"

"Yes, it—takes your breath away."

Without reply he turned back to the living room, as the old colored servant came in from the hall.

"Abe," he said, "you look after Miss Cable while she's here and see she gets anything she wants. She's boss here now, you understand."

"Yes, suh—yes, suh—I understand. How you think he looks, Marse Joe?"

"Oh, I reckon we'll pull him out of this, Abe."

The old negro helped him on with his coat. He wrote down for Madge the telephone number of the hotel where he had a room; and then taking her hand, he said,

"Well—good luck, Miss Cable—good night."

"Good night, Mr. Evans."

5

For some time she sat without stirring. With a grim smile she told herself, "That's the longest talk I've had with a man in goodness knows how many years."

She got up abruptly and went into Gordon's room. There everything was as before; and as she stood looking in at the gaunt white form on the bed, she realized all in a flash how as her brother slipped out of life she herself was coming into it—a life such as she had never known. And the two changes were bound close; the one depended on the other. It was uncanny—frightening! "I want him to live!" she cried to herself. Almost in a panic she came away, and in the front room stood rigid, restless. Sleep? She gave a strained short laugh. "Look here, the thing for you to do is to keep just as busy as you can!"

There was still a little unpacking to do. She went into her room and attended to that and then began undressing. Again she looked about her. It was a man's room, beyond a doubt. On the desk was a kodak picture of Gordon and Joe Evans in uniform, in some camp; and she stopped for a time to look at it. Then once more she found herself star-

ing down through the wide low window into the sparkling city night. She turned back, pulled down the shade, finished undressing and got into bed; but after half an hour or so, her restlessness grew so acute as to be unbearable. She rose and threw on a dressing gown and went again to Gordon's door and listened. There was not a sound. She turned into the living room and moved about slowly looking at things—books, pictures, music, knick-nacks, pipes —wondering which belonged to Gordon, which to Joe. Once again she noticed the photograph on the piano.

Old Abe came in and asked her when she would have breakfast. She looked up in a startled way.

"Oh, about seven," she replied. She colored slightly. "No—eight o'clock, please."

"Yes'm. Anything else I can do, Miss Cable?"

"No, thank you."

"Yes'm. Good night, Miss Cable."

"Good night, Abe."

He left her. It was nearly midnight now, and sitting alone in the front room the cold panicky feeling came stealing back. "If he dies before morning what shall I do? I don't know a single soul in New York!" Then she thought of Joe Evans. "Yes, I'd call him up at once. That's the first thing I would

do." Gradually Madge grew quiet again; she began to think intently of their talk an hour before, and to remember what she had said. All at once she was abashed at the eager friendliness she had shown him. "What must he think of me?" she asked. She shrank into herself—her old self—or rather the self of these last few years—the nobody self. And she wanted desperately to get back—right back into her corner! She wanted Gordon to live, not die, and go on with this strange life of his—"which is none of my business, after all!" And as she sat wishing, wishing, suddenly she felt quite sure that early in the morning, when she went into Gordon's room, she would find him with clear smiling eyes, weak but out of danger; and that she would go back home, to Amanda Berry in their flat, and in a long evening talk she would give the whole story to her friend. How uncanny and unreal, a thrilling adventure—interesting to talk about when you had left it all behind you. Yes, she wanted it like that!

"And yet suppose, on the other hand, in an hour from now——"

She clenched her small hands on the sides of the chair and felt herself grow stiff as a board.

"Uncle Phil will be here to-morrow," she thought, trying to grip her thoughts again. But now

the hubbub from outside, from the broad avenue below, had risen to a bedlam of honks and raucous blaring horns which beat into her very soul. Would they never be quiet, get ready for sleep?

Again she seemed to shrink into herself; for once more the question rose before her, stark and clear:

"Millions! What would I do with it?"

6

It must have been nearly one o'clock when the buzz of the doorbell brought her to her feet with a spring. She waited, regained control of herself, and then with a slow deliberation went out to the door and opened it. A girl in a cloak of gold brocade, with a dark oval nervous face and with big black gorgeous eyes, drew back in surprise.

"Oh—good evening!"

"Good evening. What is it, please?" inquired Madge. Without reply, the girl came by into the hall.

"Are you the nurse?"

"No," said Madge.

In an instant she was all alert; and her quick observant eyes took in the girl from head to foot. A beauty, of the vivid sort, set off by pencil and the lip stick. Nervous, tired, all keyed up. Lavish,

careless. Underneath the lovely old embroidered cloak, Madge caught glimpses of a skirt and waist by no means fresh. Beautiful ankles, dainty slippers. Hair untidy. "All mixed up. Neither one thing nor the other." All this Madge took in at a glance.

"Who are you, then, if I may ask?" the visitor said abruptly.

"I'm Mr. Cable's sister."

From the impatient lips and eyes, Madge caught a glance which seemed to say, "Oh, the devil! What a nuisance!" The girl said aloud,

"Oh—I didn't know——"

"He had any sister? He has, you see. And they telegraphed."

As they entered the living room Madge's look went to the photograph on the piano.

"How is he now?" the stranger asked.

"He seems to be no worse," said Madge; and then, a little louder: "Would you mind telling me your name?"

"Good evening, Miss O'Brien." The nurse had come out of Gordon's room, having heard the door bell; and at sight of her the visitor promptly turned away from Madge, and in her rich impatient voice began asking questions. Then she said,

"I'll see him now." And she went back into the bedroom. The nurse followed her, and for a time Madge stood staring after them, with an expression of keen dislike. "A funny way to sweep into a place, and brush a man's sister aside like that, without even stopping to tell her name. . . . I wonder if she's engaged to him—and who she is—and what she is?" Madge sat down, with a little frown of dislike and curiosity. "And it's long after midnight, too. If she really cares for him, why hasn't she been here before? Where has she been all evening?"

A few minutes later, the girl came out and went down the hall. As she passed the living room doorway, Madge caught a glimpse of her face, strained, anxious. Then she heard the outer door open and close sharply. The strange visitor was gone. And sitting there Madge asked herself,

"Now I wonder who in the world she can be—and what she has been to Gordon?"

CHAPTER II

I

On awakening the next morning, Madge went into Gordon's room. "Now he'll be better," she told herself. But she found her brother the same as before. Miss Cochran, the young day nurse, had come, and she said there had been no sign of a change. Madge went back to her room and dressed, and was at breakfast with the nurse when her Uncle Phil arrived.

He was about sixty—a tall, thin man in a loose fitting pepper-and-grey suit. He had a large soft grey moustache; he wore glasses, and his light blue eyes were hard, but with a twinkle. Madge both liked him and disliked him. Her father's only brother, he had been since her father's death the head of the family, more or less; and when Madge's home was sold, her uncle had managed the whole affair. He had been a doctor then; but a few years later, when the local druggist died, Doctor Cable had taken the store and in ten years had built up quite a business there, with toilet articles, cheap perfumes,

kodak supplies, candy, gum, cigarettes and cigars. And although, with a querulous wife at home who was forever dosing herself, and a thin gawky daughter of thirty-one who was complaining constantly, Uncle Phil had a far from easy time, somehow or other, by his smile, his smooth deep voice and the easy twinkle in his eyes, he always managed to give the appearance of a solid citizen who had come a long way up in life and could look indulgently at things. Years ago, when a patient of his had died and the relatives had gone about saying that it was all on account of a careless mistake which he had made, he had borne it off with that same easy manner. Uncle Phil was hard to faze. He had always been kind enough to Madge, and many times he had tried to persuade her to ask her rich brother for his aid—both for herself, her family and her fellow townsmen. But when she obstinately refused, and later began her slow decline, by degrees he had come to look on her as the rest of them did—as a girl who had lost her one big chance and would soon be just a little old maid.

But to-day, though his voice and his manner were as easy and smooth as before, she soon began to notice that her uncle was queerly intense. He looked at her—so differently.

"Well, Madge, and how is Gordon?" he asked at once, on his arrival. He listened closely to what she said. "Has the doctor been here this morning?" he asked.

"Not yet."

"That's good—then I shall see him. Did you talk with him last night?"

"No, he was here before I arrived."

"I see. Now I'll go in, if I may, and have a look at the patient myself."

Doctor Cable went into Gordon's room, talked to the nurse and looked at the chart; and as he studied it carefully, Madge felt a very real relief to have him here.

"Well, my dear," he said to her, when they came into the other room, "I guess to-day will settle this, one way or the other." Then noticing the strain in her face he patted her shoulder. "Now suppose you come in and finish your breakfast, and give me a little, too."

And when they were at the table, he asked, "Was Evans here when you arrived?"

"No."

"That's rather curious. Didn't he get my wire?"

"Yes—but he was at his office," she said.

Her uncle's bushy eyebrows lifted just a bit at that.

"On Sunday, eh. Looks as if their business must be pretty absorbing, these days." He drank his coffee and then inquired, "Didn't he even come last night?"

"Yes." And she told of the talk they had had. She hesitated. "And later," she said, "long after twelve—a girl came in."

Her uncle threw her a quick look.

"Who was she?"

"She didn't give me her name—but the nurse called her Miss O'Brien."

Their voices were both suddenly low.

"Didn't you talk to her?"

"Barely. She didn't give me a chance," said Madge.

As she went on to describe the brief visit, her uncle listened closely but made no comment at the end, except to say,

"Well, she'll come again, I presume—and then perhaps she'll condescend to make our acquaintance. Now how can I get in touch with Evans?"

"He said he would be coming soon. He 'phoned about an hour ago."

"Good," said Doctor Cable. "And I presume the surgeon will be here, too, before very long."

They had left the table now and gone into the living room.

"Is there room for me to sleep here?" he inquired.

"Yes," she said, "there's one room left."

"Your Aunt Abby will be needing that."

"Oh. Is Aunt Abby coming, too?"

"Yes. I tried to stop her—but she wouldn't hear to it. She'll arrive this afternoon. Better let her have the extra room, and I can bunk in there," he said, looking into the small study. "Yes, I can sleep on the sofa there—if there's any sleeping to be done."

He went and got his big satchel and took it into the small room. A little later he called to her, in a quiet tone,

"Come in here, Madge."

And when she went, she found him with a letter in his hand.

"Here's that letter Gordon wrote you in 1917," he said. She made a movement of surprise, but remembered that her uncle had asked for the letter at the time. "I've kept it in my safe," he remarked. He opened it and read it aloud. At the end he inquired, "Did you ever hear if he made that will?"

"No—I didn't." Compressing her lips, she hesi-

tated and then asked, "Do we need to talk of this now?"

"Yes, I think we do, my dear. This is a time for some pretty clear thinking. He may live—we'll hope he does. But in case he should not, we can't be too careful what goes on. Money is money—and by all accounts Gordon has a lot of it. Millions, maybe."

Madge felt a little leap in her breast.

"I don't see what we can do about that," she answered in a tone of constraint.

"Don't you?" said her uncle. "Suppose you leave that part to me?" As she hesitated still, he added, "All I want to do, of course, is to make sure that your rights are protected—that there is nothing underhand."

"Very well, Uncle—thank you."

"Good. That's all I need for the present," he said. "Now," he added quietly, "I guess I'll get on a clean shirt." As she was leaving him, he asked, "Has that nurse had her breakfast?"

"Yes——"

"And have you ordered the meals for the day?"

"Why, no."

The tolerant glance he gave her then brought back her former feeling of being so inadequate.

"Better get the run of the kitchen," he said.

Madge went in to talk with Abe. The old negro soon made her aware that he had his business well in hand and wanted no interference. And again the feeling came, "There's nothing here for me to do." But as he went on to ask her how many would be here for meals, told her how he managed things, showed her where the linen was kept, and answered other questions she put him, she felt in his whole attitude an anxious deference to herself—as though he knew that by to-morrow she might be the mistress here. She impatiently stopped this train of thought; but in spite of her efforts at self-control the strange excitement came again—and grew—till with her nerves on edge she sat as before in the living room. Her uncle came out in his shirt sleeves and went into the bathroom. Presently he came back again, went into the study and shut the door.

A few minutes later a ring of the doorbell made her jump. She went to the door and opened it, and a short stout man with a large head and a heavy shock of hair, smooth freckled face and hard square jaw, came into the hall.

"Good morning. Are you Miss Cable?" he asked.

"Yes——"

"My name is Hoyt," he said. "I'm the surgeon here. How's the patient to-day?"

"About the same, so far as we know."

"Well, we'll see about that in a minute. I'd like a few words with you first."

They went into the living room, and Madge at once began to feel something steady and strong and reassuring in his brusque voice and kindly eyes.

"Are you his only sister?"

"Yes."

"No brothers—parents—living?"

"No."

"Then you are the one responsible here."

Suddenly she felt again the load settling on her shoulders.

"Not entirely," she replied. "My uncle arrived this morning."

She turned as her uncle came out of the study, introduced him to Doctor Hoyt and listened as the two men talked. But their interview was brief. Hoyt went into Gordon's room; her uncle followed; and as she heard their voices and that of the nurse, Madge smiled to herself. For the New York surgeon was rather ignoring Uncle Phil. "Uncle won't like that," she thought. And when presently they came out again, one look at her relative's face was

enough to show her that she had been right. But the surgeon seemed to pay no heed.

"Where can I reach Mr. Evans?" he asked her. "There are some things I want to know—about the life your brother has led, and that wound he got in France. Unless his condition changes soon, we shall have to operate.

"Do you feel quite satisfied of that?" asked Doctor Cable sharply. He received an impatient look from the surgeon.

"I said, sir—if there is no change. Good day, Miss Cable—have Mr. Evans call me at my office at twelve."

"Very well, Doctor." Madge's face still wore a faint smile of relish. How her uncle did dislike it! The moment they were alone, he said, in a hard unnatural tone,

"I can't say I'm much impressed by this fellow. He seems to be getting ready to decide this whole case in a rush. This sticking a knife into a man's brains is a devilish ticklish business, at best. And when I see a surgeon going at it hammer and tongs——"

"Why, Uncle," said Madge, "he seemed to me to know just what he was about."

"Did he? Did you like the way he kept trying

to shove us aside—as a couple of nobodies here—and to put Evans in our place? Now you listen to me. Don't you let him do it, Madge—nor the nurse, nor the nigger, nor Evans himself. Understand? This case is all up to you!"

Again she felt that tingling sensation deep inside of her.

"Yes," she said, "I suppose it is. But I'm glad you're here, too, Uncle Phil."

As she talked on, in a steady voice, about her confidence in her uncle as a doctor of good common sense, and as she saw how what she said was soothing his ruffled feelings, once more she felt her power here growing quickly, hour by hour. And the old strong self-confidence of a few years ago came rapidly back.

Doctor Cable took out his watch.

"Hello—it's nearly ten," he said. "Before Evans comes, I think I'll go in and talk to the nurse. I want to learn a little more about that girl who was here last night. Didn't Evans speak of her?"

"No," said Madge, with a slight start.

"That's funny," said her relative.

And after she was left alone, Madge told herself, "That's so. It is."

2

She sat without stirring for a time—thinking about Joe Evans and their talk of the night before. Why hadn't he told her about that girl? "Well, why should he? After all, we were nothing but strangers—practically." But then with a little glow she remembered how, starting as utter strangers, they had been drawn to one another—in less than an hour—with Gordon close by, in the cool dim room. Madge drew an impatient breath. "What's the matter with me?" she asked. "Can't I just be sensible?"

Then she heard a key in the door. A moment later Joe Evans came in; and at once her self-consciousness disappeared and she felt drawn to him again. All his thoughts were so plainly on Gordon now. Desperately anxious but keeping himself well in hand, from the moment he entered he made her feel that his reliance on herself had deepened since the night before. And soon, in reply to his questions, she was again reassuring him. She told of her uncle's coming and dwelt upon his long experience as a physician, his good common sense.

"I can't tell you how relieved I feel to have him," she ended. "I've arranged that he shall sleep here to-night."

"That's good," said Joe, "I'm glad he has come. But if he's a doctor—well, you want to be careful, you know. I hope he won't try to tell Hoyt his business. I reckon you know how these doctors are. And I hope you'll remember that you are the one to decide things here—you, and nobody else but you. The rest of us—well, you can count on me to stick right behind you." A worried gleam came into his eyes. "If it weren't for that snarl we're in downtown I'd be right with you all the time. But I know that I can count on you," he ended in an earnest tone. "I knew it the minute I saw you here."

"Oh, I'm afraid I'm not so dependable as that." As she spoke she could feel the blood in her cheeks. In an even voice, she said, "But I'm going to do my best, you know, and somehow I feel so very sure that we'll bring my brother back to life."

"Yes," he said. And then, in a moment. "We've been right happy here, Miss Cable. I jest can't begin to tell you what he has meant to me," Joe went on. "I never knew a man so—" he broke off, with a little gesture. "That brother of yours is white all through—and when you're with him you work like the devil—but believe me, you sure do live. We've had some pretty scrumptious times—but some of the best and the funniest were when we were

working most of the night." His look went to the desk in the study, as though his friend were still sitting there. "I keep thinking of all he has done for me—of what I was five years ago."

After a pause, she asked him gently, "But you liked it, didn't you—out there in Texas, on a ranch?"

Slowly he seemed to bring back his thoughts.

"Yes—yes, I liked it—and I reckon that's the life for me. But to do what I wanted out there, you need a pile of money—nowadays. When I get enough of it, I guess I'll go back."

"I should think it must be wonderful. My father used to breed horses, you see, and I've always loved them," she went on. And soon she had him talking about the life upon a ranch.

In the meantime, half unconsciously, she was thinking of how just like herself he had started in a small dull town. But how he had moved! From Tennessee 'way out to Texas, then over to France and back here to New York—while she herself had stuck in her corner. A wave of warm deep restlessness went through her, and once more she asked, "What is this going to do to me?"

The clock in the hall began striking ten. With a start, they both came back to the present. Joe Evans went into the study and began to open the letters

and the telegrams on the desk. Watching his face from where she sat, she could see how abruptly all his thoughts had gone back to the business of to-day.

"But I did see into him," she thought. "Yes, sir, right down into his life!" It was as though a search-light had been turned upon it suddenly. And vaguely now she realized that the silent drama in the cool dim room close by was acting with the same effect on herself. It was as though she had stepped into a glaring path of light which struck with a revealing force deep into her existence, her desires and her dreams. She compressed her lips and frowned, as she felt how she was changing. When her uncle came out of Gordon's room, she glanced at him and thought, "You're different, too! What is it that is happening here to show each one of us up like this?"

As her uncle started to speak to her, he saw Evans through the open door, and in a sharp, low voice he asked,

"Who's that opening that mail?"

Madge almost jumped. "Oh, yes," she thought, excitedly, "you are—you are—you're different!"

She waited a bit, and then said calmly,

"That's Mr. Evans, Uncle Phil."

At the sound of their voices, Joe Evans had risen.

came in, and Madge introduced them. Doctor ble's manner was smooth and kindly as usual now. "I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Evans—this is a try- time for us all. Gordon's a fine, promising lad. 've not seen as much of him as we'd like, in these years. Still, blood is pretty thick, you know— ecially when you come from the South. So I came t down to the city to see if I couldn't be of some ."

"I sure am glad you did, sir."

"But," continued Doctor Cable, "you seem to e done about everything that anyone could do, boy. I'm sorry you've had such a strain. My ce tells me you've been having worries in your iness, too."

"Yes," Joe answered. "And I ought to be in the office right now. The fact is, we couldn't have picked a worse time for Gordon to be put out of the running."

"Nothing serious, I hope." The quiet vigilance in the eyes of Uncle Phil had come into his voice. The younger man felt it; and watching him, with a thrill Madge saw the instant change.

"Oh, no, sir—we've nothing at all to complain of."

"I'm glad of that." Madge saw her relative hesi-

tate. Then he seemed to make up his mind. "Now, Mr. Evans," he began, "this is a time for plain speaking, I think—and we might as well face the facts like men. I believe, as no doubt you do yourself, that we're going to pull my nephew through. But there's no use denying the fact that we may fail and he may die. If he does, I'm here to protect my niece."

"In what way do you mean?" Joe's low voice cut in like a knife, but Doctor Cable did not flinch.

"I have a letter here," he said, "which Gordon wrote before going to France. In it he informed my niece he was making a will in her favor. Have you ever heard him speak of it?"

"No, sir."

"If he had made one, where would it be?"

"With his other papers, I reckon—in his box at the bank," said Joe.

"Have you a key?"

"I know where it is."

"And they know you at the bank, of course."

"Yes—there'll be no trouble there."

"Then suppose we go and have a look."

There was an awkward silence.

"Why?"

"Why, there seems to be reason enough, I think.

Don't you? If there is such a will, we ought to know it. And if there should be a later will, which favors somebody else than my niece—that person ought to be notified." Uncle Phil waited a moment. "I speak now as a physician," he said. Joe winced at that.

"All right," he said, "I'll see to it."

As Doctor Cable looked at him then, Madge knew he wanted to propose that he go, too, and help in the search; and that Joe Evans knew he did. But the face of Gordon's partner had become impassive as before; and after another awkward pause Madge saw her uncle relinquish his plan. He said,

"Then if you'll do it pretty soon——"

"I'll see to it this morning and let you know."

"Thank you." Again there was silence. Then, as Joe made a move to go, "There's another point I want to clear up," Uncle Phil continued, smoothly. "Are there any intimate friends of his who are likely to be coming here? If you could give us some idea——"

"He hasn't many intimate friends. There are some, of course, who will call up—but I doubt if they'll be coming here."

"You're mistaken in that," said Doctor Cable. "My niece informs me that there was one who came

last night. She had been here yesterday twice before."

"Oh, yes—that was Leonora O'Brien," said Joe, in a voice a bit unnatural. He turned to Madge. "I would have told you about her," he said, "but I didn't reckon she could get here again last evening. She was in rehearsal for her play—which opens to-night."

"She's an actress, then," said Uncle Phil.

"Yes, sir."

"She and Gordon must be on rather intimate terms."

"They have been—yes."

"How long has he known her?"

"Nearly a year."

"Would you call it—an engagement?"

"No—I don't think so. She's all wrapped up in her stage career. I doubt if she's the marrying kind."

"I see. Well, it's none of our business, of course, and I don't want to pry into Gordon's affairs. Only, so long as he is in this critical condition—you might say, at the point of death—we can't be too careful," said Uncle Phil. "I wonder if you couldn't find out a little more about their relations?" At a quick look from Joe, he added, "We want to be fair to

her, you see. If she has any real right to be here, she must be—of course."

"I don't see how I can find that out. Gordon can't tell us——"

"No, poor lad—and all we can do is to make a careful search among his papers, to make quite sure if there's anything at all in this young woman's favor?"

Joe took no pains to conceal his dislike.

"When I go to the bank, I'll look for that."

"And in the office. His desk, perhaps."

"All right! But we'll hope he won't die, sir!"

"Yes, my boy!" Doctor Cable gripped him by the hand; and as they went to the door, he said, "I hope you won't take this too hard. There's no immediate danger, I think, and we are here to do all we can. We're grateful to you for what you have done. I speak for Gordon's family. Now you won't forget to go to the bank?"

"No, sir."

And Joe left them.

Uncle Phil turned back to Madge and said,

"Well, he seems like a good honest lad—capable, too, if I'm not mistaken. Now Madge, I'm going

to stay with Gordon. I want to study his record again and watch him. There are certain signs which mean a good deal, one way or the other. I'm thinking of Hoyt and that operation. So, if you don't mind, my dear, I'll leave you here to answer the 'phone. Gordon's friends will be calling up, no doubt——"

"Yes, Uncle, I'll attend to it."

Again she felt the deference in his manner toward herself; and she felt it still again in the voices of those men who called up in the next hour. As she said to each of them, "I'm Mr. Cable's sister," she heard the change in their voices, the sympathy and consideration; and once more she had a sense of how her position was changing.

Once or twice a woman called up, but she did not hear the voice of the girl who had been here the night before. "She won't telephone, she'll come," thought Madge. More and more her thoughts turned to this second meeting. "So she's an actress." There was a little excitement in that. "Well, I'm sorry for her, of course—if she really cares for him. But I'm not to be just shoved aside."

And so, when the young actress came about noon to the apartment, and after a few brusque questions

started to go to Gordon's room, Madge said to her, in an even tone,

"I don't think you'd better go in just yet."

The girl stopped suddenly.

"No? Why not?"

"My uncle is with him." And then to old Abe, who was in the hall, Madge said, "Will you go to Doctor Cable, Abe, and find out if it's all right for Miss O'Brien to come in?"

She turned back to the visitor.

"Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you."

With a look of surprise, curiosity and dislike, Leonora seated herself; and Madge's quick observant eyes swept over the dark blue velvet suit and the *chic* little hat. It was simple enough. "But it cost a lot," she told herself. "Yes, she goes to expensive places, but she doesn't take pains enough in the little things. The gloves aren't clean. And the whole effect—she misses it. Or perhaps she doesn't care—until she makes up for the stage. Still, she *is* a beauty. What perfectly gorgeous big black eyes."

"I wonder if you have any idea," her visitor asked abruptly, "of the strain I'm going through?"

"On account of my brother, you mean?"

"That's part of it. That's most of it. If he dies, I don't know what I'll do!" And her lips quivered suddenly. "Are you acting?" Madge was thinking. "No, I don't believe you are."

"But that's not all," the girl went on. "I'm an actress, you know—and my play is opening to-night. They're starring me—for the first time. And I've got all *that* to go through with!"

"Can't you get someone to take your place?"

She caught a glance of amusement which said, "Oh, you ridiculous little old maid!" And she reddened angrily.

"Hardly," Leonora replied. "It's the chance I've worked for all my life. Gordon wouldn't want me to miss it, I know!"

"I see," said Madge.

Leonora drew a breath of impatience and tapped her small foot on the floor. For some moments nothing was said. But Madge, alert and strained herself and sensitive to impressions, had a quickening sense of the warm vivid youth and sex in this girl, the glamour of this life she led. Fame, adventures, love affairs, rouge and powder and bouquets, late suppers—all she had read or heard of actresses came into her mind with a rush, in a jumble. She wondered how much of it was true. And with Gor-

don—how far had it gone? What were the girl's intentions here—if he lived—if he died?

When Doctor Cable came into the room, Leonora rose at once; and as in his smooth easy way he began to question her, Madge saw the girl clench both her hands. "How terribly keyed up she is. Well, for that matter so am I. She'll have to learn to control herself." Uncle Phil was saying now that Gordon's condition was no worse, and that there was no immediate danger. But Leonora soon cut in:

"I'll go in and see him, if you don't mind."

"Just a moment," he replied. "The nurse will let us know when she's ready for a visitor." He ignored her breath of exasperation and continued evenly, "You are on the stage, I understand."

"Yes."

"Mr. Evans tells me that you have known Gordon for some time."

"I have."

"And have you—seen much of each other?"

"Yes—we have." To the hostility in her eyes he gave a slight indulgent smile, and then with a sympathetic air, "Now, my dear young lady," he said, "it's useless to conceal from ourselves that my nephew is in a critical state. You must forgive my questions. I feel that we, his family, should know

how matters stand between you. Because if you are engaged to Gordon——"

"I'm not engaged to him!" burst from her lips. "I—really—whether I am or not seems to me to be a matter between Gordon and myself!" She rose from her seat. "And if you don't mind——" She caught sight of the nurse in the doorway. "Oh—may I come in now?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed, Miss O'Brien." The pretty young nurse made no attempt to conceal her admiration for this rising Broadway star.

"Then please leave me alone with him!"

"Yes, Miss O'Brien."

The two disappeared into the hall; and glancing at her Uncle Phil, Madge saw a relieved expression there. After a brief silence, he said,

"I'm glad the young lady makes no claim of any promise to marry her. She's not just the kind of girl we're used to in our family."

As he spoke, in his hard blue eyes Madge caught a quiet twinkle; and with dislike she told herself, "I'll bet all men are like that with her—old and young, rich and poor! She—appeals to them! She—that's her kind!" Aloud she said,

"No, I certainly shouldn't care to have her for a sister-in-law."

Her uncle smiled.

"Well, my dear, I guess there's no serious danger of that."

Leonora soon came back to them, and asked, in a curt anxious tone,

"You say Mr. Evans has been here?"

"Yes," said Doctor Cable.

"I must see him—right away! I don't agree with you about Gordon—I consider his condition serious, to say the least!"

"My dear young lady——"

She cut him off: "And I want to be sure—absolutely—that we're doing the best thing! Money—nothing—should be spared!"

"It won't be, Miss O'Brien," said Madge, in a low indignant voice. But the girl had already turned to the door.

"I'll telephone Joe at the office," she said.

"So you call him Joe, do you?" thought Madge to herself. Aloud she said, "I'm sorry you don't feel that you can give up your play this evening. I hope it's a very great success."

"Oh, thank you!"

Exit Leonora.

Madge turned back and caught again the twinkle in her uncle's eyes. He sat down and lit a cigar, and

picked up the morning paper. She went to the window and stood looking out—stood without stirring for some time. Beneath her air of composure, she was a creature of changing moods, and her feelings were changing rapidly now. Her indignation cooled a bit, and she was sorry for Leonora. "In her way she does really care for him," she thought. "Yes—she does. And her play—why not? It's her first big chance—means everything to a girl like that. I guess I'd feel keyed up myself." But then back came the hostility. "Still, she hadn't any right to act as though we didn't exist! Now she'll go to Joe Evans, I suppose, and I'll bet she makes a regular scene about the way we're neglecting Gordon!" With a sudden twinge she asked, "I wonder how she and Joe Evans get on? Suppose Gordon dies—will he be her next, or will it be somebody else? There must be perfect dozens!"

Doctor Cable looked up from his paper, and watching his niece with a smile, he said,

"You don't exactly take to her."

"No, I can't say that I do."

"Still," he replied, with a meditative puff of smoke from his cigar, "I don't see that there's any harm in her seeing Gordon, if she wants to. He's

unconscious as a log, poor lad—she can't play any scene with him just now."

"I don't like her acting as though she owned this whole apartment!"

"Well, my dear, perhaps she does."

"What on earth——" she stopped. Her uncle looked back at her and said,

"That's why I asked Evans to find out if Gordon has made any other will."

"Oh-h."

"And now she's going to Evans, too—possibly with the same thing in view. Or if not that, exactly —well, she's going where the money is. The king is dead—long live the king. One man with a bank account may be about as good as another."

"No, Uncle Phil! She isn't that kind!"

"My dear girl," he retorted, "these actresses are all alike."

"She isn't! She does care for him!"

"Of course she does—in her way," he said. "But I'm just as glad she admitted that she was not engaged to him—because if there's no will at all, as I think more than likely, she might have put in some kind of a claim."

His niece looked at him excitedly.

"I tell you, Uncle, I don't believe she cares a rap

about money—one way or the other!" With a short laugh, Madge added, "No doubt it's easy enough to get—for a girl with eyes like that."

"Millions?"

He said it quietly, but from her uncle's hard blue eyes came a look which made her pulse beat faster. He drew again on his cigar.

"At home," he said, "I could find out all about that girl in no time. Well, this is New York. We'll have to wait. But I don't feel very anxious, my dear, for I have a feeling in my bones that Evans won't find any other will, and that Gordon, in spite of his long neglect, has been loyal to his sister."

The next instant, without warning, the tears welled up in Madge's eyes. She turned away and went to the window. "Poor Gordon!" she exclaimed to herself. "Why are we talking and thinking like this? It's cold, it's inhuman! Oh," thought Madge, "I wish he were well, and that I were home! He doesn't care about *my* being here!"

A ring at the door made her turn with a start.

"Now who can *that* be?"

"Steady, Madge." Doctor Cable got up. "Just save yourself as much as you can."

He went to the door, and a moment later came back with a telegram in his hand.

"It's from your Cousin Ray," he said. "Your Aunt Abby will be here at one forty-five." He looked at his watch and added, "It's after one already. I'll go and meet her at the train."

Madge felt a little rush of relief.

"I'm glad Aunt Abby is coming," she said.

"Yes—this is a family time," he answered, with his kindly smile. He went and put on his hat and coat. "You'll keep some lunch for us, I suppose——"

"Yes," said Madge, "I'll see to it."

CHAPTER III

I

As she sat waiting for them, half unconsciously Madge began to think of what this might mean to her aunt.

Aunt Abby Dwight was closer to Gordon than Uncle Phil. She had been so good to him when he was small; he had often stayed with her for weeks at a time. Yet in all these years he had done so little in return. A Christmas present now and then—when he happened to remember it. But nothing more. And oh, what a difference a little money would have made! The widow of a minister, left in her early thirties with no money but a small insurance and five children to bring up, she had lived in a shabby house half way up the hill from the town, with a bit of garden and farming land, and had had a pretty desperate time—trying one thing after another, failing in nearly every one. Aunt Abby did lovely sewing, but she was poor at collecting bills. And so it was in other things. She simply had no business head. And her patient smiling faith in an

All-Wise-Providence had often made Madge ready to scream. More than once she had had to step in and help, and her Uncle Phil had done the same—until at last Aunt Abby's life had grown a little easier.

First Ray, who was her oldest son, went to work in the new town garage; then Paul began to take hold of the farm. And their mother never tired of singing the praises of her sons. Paul was twenty-three by now and was doing fairly well with poultry and some hives of bees. But meanwhile Ray, who was twenty-six, had married and had two babies; and Ann his wife was a giddy young thing, so greedy for clothes and parties that Ray was always in debt, these days—let alone helping his mother. The three girls, Salome, Ruth and Janet, were twenty-two, twenty and sixteen. They helped their mother about the house; Ruth worked for Uncle Phil in the drug-store, earning eleven dollars a week; and Salome was making rugs. So between them they managed to get on; and they had a good deal of fun out of it, too. But they couldn't afford to get nice things; and though they did go to parties, there was not a man in sight, nor was there very likely to be. And their mother worried about that.

Yes, it had been a hard worrying life. What a tremendous difference a little money would make to

her now! And millions! Madge felt how the thought of that must have been with Aunt Abby on the train, as she sat staring out at the Hudson—and at home last night with her children, excitedly discussing the news. At first really shocked, no doubt, for she'd been like a mother to Gordon once—but then vaguely warmed and thrilled. And her children, too. Ray would have motored out with Ann; and as they talked of Gordon, into the minds of every one would have leaped the thought of his millions, and with it the question, "Why shouldn't Mother get some of this?"

"And she shall," decided Madge. "Just think how much she did for him—and how she has worn herself to the bone. Ten years ago she was really pretty. Now look at her—old at forty-nine. Poor thing—how excited she must be."

2

And when Aunt Abby reached the apartment, Madge could see it in her face. Often she had noticed the contrast between the sweetness in the patient mouth of her aunt and a little caustic quality in the small worried looking eyes. But now they were excited, bright; she looked disturbed and anxious, all keyed up to meet this situation—perhaps the

greatest in her life. A meager figure of medium height, Aunt Abby had lovely soft gray hair, worn low to conceal as best she could a birth mark, which when she was tired showed an ugly patch of red. It showed quite distinctly now, but she had herself fairly well in control. She took Madge in her arms and said,

"You poor child. What a strain it must have been for you—here all alone last evening."

"I'm glad you've come, Aunt Abby," said Madge, with a slight tremor. For her aunt brought an old fashioned and familiar motherliness which was a relief. The past came with her into the room. She wanted to nurse Gordon herself, just as she had when he was a boy. She told how on one of his visits he had been ill from poison ivy; another time he had broken his arm. She had nursed him then—so why not now?

"I don't care much for these modern trained nurses," she said, "who come right into a person's home and shut the family out of the room. You and I can take care of Gordon, Madge—it's the least that we can do for him. And with your Uncle Phil here, too—and one of us in the room day and night —yes, I think that would be best."

Madge smiled at her aunt sympathetically—feel-

ing her effort to be adequate, to be steady and self-controlled, to keep down those disturbing dreams and do the very best for Gordon.

"I'd like to, Auntie," she replied, "but I don't think we'd better. You see—" And she went on to explain what the surgeon had told her of the close watch that must be kept of the pulse, the respiration and various other significant signs. As she made her decision and explained, again Madge felt her power here; and her sense of this was increased by the way Mrs. Dwight deferred to her.

"Very well, my dear child, you know the situation far better than I do," she said.

Aunt Abby knew of that letter, of course, from Gordon to Madge when he went to France. And it did make a difference. "Toadying? No, she isn't that kind. But I'm just different in her eyes."

"Haven't any of Gordon's friends been here to help you?" asked Mrs. Dwight; and by her questions she soon learned about Evans and Leonora O'Brien. As to the latter, she tried at once to take a decided stand.

"If she's that sort of woman, I think, my dear, that we had better keep her out. This is no time for actresses." And then, in a sharp vigilant tone, "Does she claim to be engaged to him?"

"No," said Madge's uncle. "When I asked her that, she even went so far as to deny it. And I don't see as she can do any harm. No claim on him, so far as we know—and so long as he's unconscious, there's nothing at all that she can do."

"You never can tell," said Mrs. Dwight, with the look of concern still in her eyes. But in the talk which followed, she soon dismissed the girl from her thoughts, as being simply one more proof of how Gordon had lavished his wealth upon sinful dissipations, neglecting his own flesh and blood. And Aunt Abby did not want to think of poor dear Gordon's sins just now, she wanted just to pity him. To save his life? Yes, again and again she came back to the question, "Is there nothing else we can do?" But there was nothing. Already she was sure in her mind that he would die, and that all she could do was to be here to comfort him if he roused at the end—and to save his soul. Once she asked Madge if she knew where was the nearest Baptist church.

Madge doubted if Gordon went to church or would even want a clergyman; and she hinted as much; but she could feel her aunt gently putting the grown man aside. He was dying. It was kinder to ignore his irreligious life and long neglect of his family, and to resurrect instead the image of the im-

pulsive lovable little boy whom they had known so long ago. In the rambling talk that afternoon she drifted back to those old days, talking of Madge and Gordon, and then of her own children. Her talk ran on and on through the years, and always deep beneath it Madge could feel the awakening hopes. In spite of herself, Aunt Abby's mind kept turning to the happiness which might come now to Ray and Paul and to the girls, who might have trips and pretty clothes and get some pleasure out of life. Husbands might be found for them. There was something pathetic about it to Madge; for Aunt Abby was so naïve in the way she let these vaguely stirring dreams be seen in the hints she gave her niece, while she thought they were all hidden deep—admitted barely to herself. Once more the silent drama in the cool dim room close by was throwing a hard revealing glare of light—into Aunt Abby's motherhood.

"It's all for them," Madge told herself. "She hasn't a thought for herself, poor dear. All she'd ask of money would be a chance to rest from the grind."

Her aunt began to show the strain; and detecting the signs of weariness, Madge got up to go to the kitchen and make some tea. On the way she stopped.

Should she ring for Abe? "Oh, don't be so foolish!" she told herself. She went into the kitchen and said,

"Abe, will you make some tea and toast?"

"Yes'm, Miss Cable."

When he brought it, to her surprise, Madge found that she was hungry. The thin crisp little slices of toast, and the jam and the cakes, were all so delicious. As, with an unconscious look of solid comfort, Mrs. Dwight sat at her tea, Madge saw her eyes go about the room. All this was what money could bring in life. A glance she threw at her niece seemed to say, "And all this is coming to you—and I'm so glad it is, my dear—and I know you'll be fair and generous." Back again went her thoughts to her children. Aloud she said,

"Madge, if you don't mind, I think I'll telegraph for Ray. I'd like him to be here with me."

"Very well, Auntie—of course," said Madge, "if it will be any comfort." And turning to Doctor Cable she asked, "Uncle Phil, will you attend to it?"

"Yes, my dear."

Madge leaned restfully back in her chair. How everyone she spoke to responded to her slightest wish!

"Now, Aunt Abby," she said, presently, "I want you to have a nice warm bath and take a little rest. You need it."

Mrs. Dwight demurred a bit, but Madge insisted and had her way.

"I don't think I shall sleep, my dear—but it is certainly good to rest," said Aunt Abby. She lay back on the pillows, the hard lines on her face all smoothed away; and in her eyes was an expression of real content, as they went to the chintz curtains, the small mahogany bureau, the big chintz covered willow chair.

"I wonder who furnished this room?" thought Madge. "I wonder if Leonora O'Brien had anything to do with it?"

Then she heard the telephone, and for the next hour or so she was kept busy speaking with men who had just come home from their offices and were calling up to ask about Gordon. There must have been eight or ten of them, and all were sympathetic and kind. Joe Evans called up, and the sound of his voice gave her a little thrill of excitement. But her tone was steady enough as she replied to his questions.

"Isn't there anything at all that I can do for you?" he asked.

"No, thank you," she said quietly. "Will you be coming in later to-night?"

"Yes, I'm still down at the office—but I'll be up about ten o'clock—if that isn't too late, Miss Cable."

"No—it isn't. Good-by, Mr. Evans."

An hour later some roses arrived, and she found his card inside the box. As she looked at them, a flush of color came into her face. It was years and years since anyone had sent her flowers.

"How very nice and kind of him!"

3

For Madge the evening which followed was quite different from the night before. Feeling herself once again in the bosom of her family, with the responsibility shared and with nothing to decide for the moment, her thoughts were colored more and more by the belief of her relatives—that in spite of all they could do, Gordon would die and within a few hours she would be rich beyond all dreams. With her uncle and aunt sympathetic and kind, she felt drawn to them both this evening. She did not let herself even think of the motive which had brought them here and had caused this attitude toward herself, for she did not want to have any hard thoughts about anyone at all to-night. Why shouldn't they share in Gordon's wealth? Why

should she keep it all to herself? Were they not her own flesh and blood?

At dinner and later that evening, the talk went back again into the past. From a hint dropped by Mrs. Dwight, Madge knew she was planning that Gordon's body be taken back home. The man who had neglected them all was to be buried and forgotten, or rather replaced by the warm hearted little boy of long ago. Even now, as their memories rose, the picture of him grew more and more clear, brought back to life to take the place of the man who lay in the room close by. It was a strange thing that was happening. While Gordon lay unconscious there, his family had come pouring in; not only these three relatives, but with them, through their memories, many other figures rose, silent and invisible, his father and his mother, his small cousins and his friends, all emerging out of the years, all of them helping to bring back the image of the little boy.

And Madge came under the spell of it, too. As her Aunt Abby rambled on about Gordon as a child on her farm, the scrapes he had got into, his many troubles and his joys, his solemn dreams and great ambitions (all colored by Aunt Abby now), and the confessions he had made while saying his prayers

with his head on her knees—the image grew steadily more clear. Once or twice Madge asked herself, "Was he ever really just like that?" But then again the spell took hold; for all this time there were other memories rising up out of herself, and Uncle Phil kept joining in with recollections of his own—of Gordon, the thin, eager lad of sixteen who had driven his doctor's buggy. Together they had answered calls all along the riverside and back up into the hills. And they had had long talks, he said, of what the boy was to make of his life. With a smile Uncle Phil remembered he had paid him only eight dollars a week—fair enough wages for those days, but small when compared to the immense ambitions of the youngster, who had urged on the doctor's mare as though to speed up his own career.

As Uncle Phil went on to enlarge upon the striking character traits of the future millionaire, vaguely Madge felt how they were lifting Gordon up onto a pedestal, there to remain as a mythical figure in the family memories—the first rich man, the rugged beginning of one more wealthy family in this bountiful, teeming land. And although she protested, "What are we doing? He'll live! He must!"—once more did that curious novel sense of power and of fresh, new life steal back upon her; and

again, in spite of herself, up out of her inmost depths came pictures of what her life might be. Vistas opened, warm and stirring; embryo plans began to appear.

Now from the veiled questions and the indirect remarks of her uncle and her aunt, she knew they both took it for granted that she would go back to Halesburg, and they were beginning to ask what she would do with all this money. To begin with, she would buy back the old home—her Aunt Abby plainly hinted at that. And later, from a remark of her uncle's as to the need of a first class hospital in their town, she saw where his thoughts were running. And all this centered on herself. She saw that they both pictured her as the great woman figure there. With a slight inner smile, she thought, "I'd rather leave that to Uncle Phil. He'd so love to be First Citizen. I'll build a hospital and put him in charge. Yes, and I'll buy back our old home, and give it to Aunt Abby—with money enough to run it, too, and have a little ease in her life, and a chance to marry off the girls." What a pleasant, gracious figure Aunt Abby would make in that old frame house, with all her worries smoothed away.

"But what about me? What would I do?" The moment she thought about herself, she said uncon-

sciously "would"—not "will"—not only because it seemed selfish and hard to think of her own future, with her brother still alive, but because it was all too strange and tremendous, this question of "Millions —what would you do?" And she wanted to keep putting it off.

But it could not be put off, it seemed. For as she sat impassive there, listening to her relatives, her own thoughts drifting on and on—the plans began. "Would I keep this apartment?" No, Joe Evans would be here. Poor boy, how lonely and lost he'd be. "On account of the business," she told herself, "I'd see a good deal of him, I suppose." At the queer new feeling which stirred in her breast, she frowned and tried to put it down, but up again in spite of her came that deep and long repressed, disturbing Madge-that-might-have-been. In Joe's room the night before, she had seen two opera tickets. She recalled them now and reddened slightly. Quickly and impatiently she turned her thoughts another way—to her old dream of a business career. For a moment she tried to picture herself as one of the active partners in an immense department store. But then she thought, "If all this money came to me, why should I spend my life making more? There's so much else a woman can do."

She remembered a big woman's club here which she had often read about. It was forever starting things, opening up new fields of life to women and girls, rich and poor, and pulsing with activities, the spirit of this Woman's Age. Well, and she would join it now; and with her own abilities, of which she felt so sure to-night, and with her brother's millions helping to open door after door, window after window—she caught herself up, almost with a cry.

"It wouldn't be only the money," she thought. "It would be me—me—me! Haven't I always known I had it in me if I got the chance?" And at last the chance was coming!

Now she recollected what she had seen the night before, looking into the sparkling city night; and she found herself wanting to be there again, alone, with a chance to think more clearly. She compressed her lips and thought, "I'm not likely to sleep much to-night!"

She noticed a sudden silence, and with a slight turn of her head she saw her relatives watching her with curious eyes, guessing her dreaming. A vivid blush of embarrassment mounted quickly to her cheeks. To cover it, Aunt Abby said, with a sympathetic smile,

"You poor child, how tired and nervous you must be. You'll need a good rest after this."

And she suggested a trip abroad. Listening, Madge asked herself, "Shall I take Aunt Abby with me? What a wonderful thing it would be for her —one real spree at last in her life!" But the next minute Madge recalled that Amanda Berry and she had planned to go over and work for Hoover—to work hard, in the seething whirl out of which a new world was being born. How eagerly they had planned for that adventure over seas—but now with all this money behind them how much bigger it might be! A startled look came into her eyes as she realized all that she might do! Just for a moment she saw herself hobnobbing with cabinet ministers—yes, and even with kings and queens! And she had been a nobody, only one short day before! Millions! Oh, it was funny!

4

But about ten o'clock Joe Evans arrived, and his coming brought back to her with a rush her sense of the genial, vigorous life which had been in these rooms. "After all, it's his home and Gordon's," she thought. "What are we but strangers, and what business have we here? We've been acting as if we

owned the place!" Poor Joe, for all his self-control, was plainly under such a strain. Her sympathy went out to him. When her Uncle Phil inquired if he had had time to go to the bank, she saw Joe wince, and she looked away.

"Yes," he said, "and here it is."

From his pocket he took an envelope and handed it to Doctor Cable. Madge knew at once it was Gordon's will. What a grim looking thing it was. She stiffened and she held her breath while her uncle read it to himself. It was short, thank Heaven! In a minute he looked up at her.

"This seems to be quite clear, my dear. It's the will he made before going to France, and it follows what he said in his letter." Turning to Joe, Doctor Cable inquired, "You found nothing else?"

"No, sir."

"Did you look in his desk at the office and anywhere else where such papers might be?"

"Yes."

"And—nothing?"

"Nothing."

In the brief silence which followed, Madge could feel that their thoughts, like her own, had come to Leonora O'Brien. In a troubled tone, Joe said,

"I reckon Miss O'Brien will be coming pretty

late to-night. It's the opening night of her play, you see." He paused uneasily. "If she does, I hope you-all will remember what a right hard time this is for her. It's not only Gordon, but her play. I haven't seen much of her myself, but I've seen enough to show me how these stage people are inside. There just simply isn't anything else in the world for them but the theater—especially on an opening night. And this one is her first big chance. It may make her a star."

"Well, my boy, I hope it does," said Madge's uncle smoothly, with that indulgent look in his eyes. But Aunt Abby said, in a caustic tone,

"I'm sorry she feels she must come here to-night." Joe Evans turned and looked at her.

"She does feel so," he answered. She met his look unflinchingly.

"But I understand," she said, "that you don't believe she's engaged to Gordon."

"No—I don't believe she is. I reckon he probably wanted it—but that she wouldn't."

"She *wouldn't?* Why not?"

"He wanted her to give up the stage."

"Naturally!" said Mrs. Dwight. "And you mean to say she refused?"

"Yes," said Joe, "I know she did."

"Are you quite sure of that?" Doctor Cable inquired.

"Yes, I heard them argue it out."

"Oh. You heard them."

"Yes, sir."

These last words, though in a low tone, were spoken so sharply by the two men that Madge drew in her breath with a gasp. It was as if her uncle had said, "Then you will be a witness to that!"—and as if Joe Evans had replied, "I will! But for the dear God's sake let's give this man a chance to live!"

She clenched her small hands, held herself; and in a moment, quiet again, she said to Joe in a steady voice,

"I do so hope that Gordon will be better in the morning."

"So do I," he answered, with a look of gratitude. He had risen. "May I see him now?"

"Yes—please!"

She took him in and left him there, but at the door she could not resist glancing back. By the bed, Joe, tall and clumsy, motionless, stood looking down at the face of his friend. Again she noticed his big hands, so limp and helpless, and again her sympathy went out to him. "How hard for him it would be!"

she thought. With the rush of pity came again that warm tingle through her being. She dismissed it with an angry frown. "But Gordon is going to live, you know!"

When, a few minutes later, Joe came back into the front room, his whole manner had changed. It was intense, imperative.

"I've been talking to the nurse," he said. "It's nearly forty-eight hours now, and every hour from now on his chances are less, if he doesn't come to. If he doesn't, they've got to operate!"

"No."

This one word from Uncle Phil made the younger man turn angrily. But Doctor Cable looked steadily back.

"I'm a physician myself," he said, "with a good many years of experience. And this business of cutting into a man's brain——"

"But if it's his only chance, sir!"

"It isn't. His only possible chance is to be left alone, so that Nature can do her work."

"Oh, I reckon we can't count much on that! He was hit twice in France, you know, and he's never been the same man since. And besides, there's been the strain in his business! In these last weeks——"

Doctor Cable cut in. "That only makes me more

certain," he said, "of the danger of an operation. And I think," he concluded with emphasis, "you will have to leave this for us to decide."

Joe stared for a moment, then turned away. But the realization of the power of Gordon's family here, which came to him in that instant, had showed so plainly on his face, that with a tightening of her whole frame Madge said to her uncle,

"If Mr. Evans wishes it, I see no reason why we shouldn't have a consultation."

"I *would* like it," Joe put in, with another quick look of gratitude.

"I don't see any need of it," said Doctor Cable, with a frown.

"Still—it can't do any harm." She waited a moment. "And I think we'd better just decide on that—for to-morrow—if there is no change."

In the awkward silence, she turned to Joe.

"Will you call up Doctor Hoyt and arrange it?"

"Yes—at once," Joe answered. "Thank you!"

As he went to the telephone, Madge threw a glance at her uncle and aunt. Uncle Phil wore a look of stiff surprise at her quiet assertion of power here. Aunt Abby looked humbly admiring.

"Yes, Madge, I think that's wise," she said.

Madge smiled at her affectionately.

"It's nearly eleven, Auntie. Don't you think you'd better go to bed?"

Mrs. Dwight's face took on at once an expression of anxious indecision.

"Do you think I'd better, Madge? I'm quite ready to sit up all night, my dear child——"

"There isn't any need of that. Uncle will be right here, you know——"

"But there's that young actress. If she comes gallivanting around——"

Madge smiled again.

"If she does, she won't care to talk to us. Now come along, Aunt Abby. Please."

5

When Madge came back from her aunt's room, her Uncle Phil was in the study, reading and smoking a cigar. Joe was waiting for her. He said,

"I've arranged for the consultation—for to-morrow morning at ten."

"Thank you, Mr. Evans, I'm so glad we decided on that." There was a slight pause and then she said, "And thank you for the roses, too. It was very thoughtful and kind, I'm sure."

Embarrassed herself, she saw at once that he felt a bit awkward, too.

"Oh, it was nothing at all," he said. "Is there nothing else I can do for you?"

"No, thanks—I think we've done everything now." But as he started to bid her good night, she added with a little smile, "I wish you wouldn't go just yet. There's so much I want to ask you—about Gordon. I know so little, you see—and I want to. This has made me feel so close to him."

Soon she had Joe in an easy chair. "Why don't you smoke?" she suggested; and as he lit a cigarette she picked up some knitting brought with her from home, and in a tone of quiet composure began with her questions.

To them both had come again a sense of relief—this time at the thought of the consultation. The doctors to-morrow would decide. At least they themselves had done all they could. And once more she instinctively took a tone as though her brother would surely get well. "I want to know him so much better after this," she said to Joe. Her questions—about Gordon in France, and later in his life over here—were of a kind to draw out what she thought was the very best in him. She ignored this dubious love affair, and kept both their minds instead on her brother's bravery at the Front and his friendly human qualities brought out in the hard

life of the trenches. Then she brought her questions back to New York, to the deepening friendship between the two men and the things they had done together here. She asked Joe about those tickets to the opera she had seen in his room; and when he said that Gordon and he had gone several times together, she at once inquired eagerly what operas they liked the best. She tried to show him that she, too, had loved good music always, and even from her corner had tried to keep up with the music world. As a matter of fact, her knowledge was scant. But when she made one awful mistake and instantly guessed it, by the questioning look in his eyes, she broke off quickly, and went on,

"It's funny you love good music, after the kind of life you've led. I think it's so nice."

"I didn't like it at first," he said. "Old Gordy jest had to drag me there. But I'm getting to like it better now—when it's not too grand and scrumptious. You see, I always did like singing—even out in Texas."

She caught him up at once on that.

"Oh, yes—I meant to ask you! I saw a little book last night—I think it was called 'Cowboy Songs.'" She went and took it from a shelf, and soon she had him telling her of those folk songs of

the early days when the cowboys still reigned in the great South West—songs of their loves and dissipations, crimes and feuds, heroic deeds. And he told her of the long, long drives from Texas far up to the north in the spring, when circling 'round the herd at night the lonely cowboy sentinel, on a pony half asleep, had sung lullabies to the huge beasts that he called "little doggies," to keep them quiet and prevent the danger of a stampede. Joe's soft, deep voice grew low as he spoke; in his eyes she could see the memories rise of the vast rolling uplands, the shadowy forms of hills to the west, the night's immensity overhead.

On and on and on they talked—till glancing at the clock on the mantel she saw that it was midnight. With a look at Joe she saw that he had forgotten the time, and with a tingling feeling she bent her head to her knitting, asking questions now and then, or giving him quick little smiles and looks of understanding. She felt vibrant, all alert. At something funny that he told, a tense little laugh burst out of her.

6

It was nearly one o'clock. At the ringing of the door bell, they both looked up in a startled way. Then he said,

"I reckon that's Miss O'Brien. Shall I go to the door?"

"Yes, please."

As he did so, in the study behind her Madge heard her uncle get up from his chair. "He has been there all the time," she thought, "listening to every word we said!" And she colored a little. Her uncle came in and stood waiting with his eyes on the hall. But Leonora stopped out there, and with a sudden pang Madge saw both hands of the young actress go up to Joe's shoulders in appeal.

"How is he, Joe? Any better to-night?"

"No, Nora, he's jest about the same."

There came something like a sob from the girl, but her voice was hard and demanding:

"And are we to go on doing nothing—nothing?"

"We're doing the best that we know how," he answered in a kindly tone. "Miss Cable will tell you."

With that he brought her into the room; but with only a glance at Madge and her uncle, and a brief "Good evening!"—abruptly she turned back to Joe.

"But when I was here last night," she said, "the nurse spoke of the chance of an operation!"

Then Madge spoke up:

"We're not yet sure that will be wise."

The girl looked at her quickly.

"But how can *you* tell?" she demanded.

Madge looked back at her steadily, now with open dislike in her eyes.

"My uncle is a physician, you know——"

Leonora wheeled upon him and asked,

"Do you feel you can set your opinion against that of the best surgeon in town?"

Madge heard a slight indignant gasp and saw her aunt in the doorway, in an old blue dressing gown.

"Oh, Aunt Abby, won't you come in? This is my aunt, Mrs. Dwight—Miss O'Brien."

"How do you do?" said Leonora, with a curt, angry nod of her head.

"Very well, I thank you," Aunt Abby replied, with an effort at quiet dignity. "I understand you are a friend of poor Gordon's. I'm glad to meet any friend of his. He was like my own son as a boy, you see; and in this very critical time——"

Leonora cut her off. With a nervous twitch of her lips, she exclaimed,

"Yes, it does seem critical—and yet we seem to be doing nothing—nothing!" She turned to Joe. "I can't go on like this, Joe!" she said, in a voice

loud and trembling. "I simply can't—it will drive me insane! I must know that every possible thing is being done!"

In a hard, low voice, Madge said to her,

"It is being done."

"How do you know it is?" she cried. And then, to Joe, "I consider that we should have at once a consultation," she declared, "of the very biggest surgeons in town!"

"You're right," said Joe, "and that's what we have done. Miss Cable has arranged for that."

"Oh." With a slight drop in her voice. "Then that at least is being attended to. I'll go now and see Gordon a moment. Will you come with me, Joe?" she asked.

When they had gone, there was a brief silence. The face of Mrs. Dwight was a study.

"Well!" she began. As she stopped, to find words for her indignation, Uncle Phil put in with a twinkle, "She certainly seems to own the roost."

"What right has she? What right has she? Madge," cried her aunt, in a quivering tone, "I think you should put a stop to this! Here's Gordon at the point of death. Any moment his soul may fly to his Maker. Is this any time to have actresses

rushing in at all hours of the night?" In her wrath, poor little Mrs. Dwight gave a sound between a sob and a snort. She was fearfully tired. "To come here with the paint still on her lips! Lips that I haven't any doubt——" She stopped with a jerk and began again: "I see it all now. Mr. Evans spoke of poor Gordon's health as being depleted—lessening his chances now. It was due to a strain in business, he said. I begin to see where the strain came in! And I say we should put a stop to it!"

But before Madge could reply to this, her uncle spoke up quietly:

"Wait, now, wait—I'm watching this, Abby—and, rest assured, this young woman will not be allowed to work any mischief hereabouts. If the time ever comes——"

Uncle Phil stopped short, as the other two were heard coming back from Gordon's room.

As Leonora entered, her dark, handsome face was impatient still, but her manner was not so arrogant.

"Joe must have said something to her," thought Madge. "After all, I'm Gordon's sister—and I don't propose to let her——"

"Good-night, Miss Cable," said Leonora, with an effort at a smile. "I'm so glad you have decided

upon a consultation. It is so absolutely the only thing for us to do."

"Yes," said Madge, in a more friendly tone, "and I'm trying for that—every moment I'm here." Then, as Leonora turned to go, she continued gently, "You have not told us of your play. Was it a success, do you think?"

The young actress gave a nervous shrug.

"I hope so—they all told me so. That's why I'm so late in coming here. They all came crowding back on the stage, and I simply couldn't get away."

Suddenly there came to Madge a vivid picture of that scene. Men in evening clothes, of course, with roses, smiles and a clamor of praise. She could picture it as though she were there. She had read of it in the Sunday papers.

"I see," she said.

"But you never can be sure till you read the notices the next day. And not even then," said Leonora. She broke off with a sigh of fatigue, and with a "Good-night," she left the room.

Joe followed her into the hall, but when she had gone he reappeared, and said to them with a look of concern,

"You-all mustn't mind her manner to-night—you

jest can't judge a girl like that. You haven't any idea of the strain."

"No, I don't believe we have," said Aunt Abby. And from the look she gave him poor Joe appeared to shrink into himself.

"I wish you could understand," he said. "Well, I guess I must be going now." And as Madge went with him into the hall, he added, "I'll be here in time for the consultation to-morrow, of course. And you know where you can reach me to-night, if anything——" he stopped. "Good-night."

"Good-night," she said. "I'm sorry. We'll hope he will be so much better soon."

"Yes," said Joe.

When he had left, she turned slowly back into the room; and at once Aunt Abby began again:

"I repeat, Madge, that if I were you I'd keep that woman out from now on! Her conduct here—her rudeness——"

"Yes, Aunt Abby, I know all that. But—well, she's different, that's all—and the main point is that if Gordon were conscious he'd want her here."

"How do you know?"

"Mr. Evans says so," Madge replied, "and he knows Gordon pretty well."

"Mr. Evans is only a poor weak boy! She has

him already right under her thumb! If Gordon dies, he'll be her next!"

Madge gave a slight start, and stiffened.

"That's hardly our business, Aunt Abby," she said.

"It *is* our business—yours at least—to protect poor Gordon!"

"I'm doing so!"

"Are you?" retorted Mrs. Dwight, her nerves now plainly all on edge. "It seems to me you are setting aside your uncle's best judgment!"

"How do you mean?"

"In this matter of an operation!"

"Oh, no—I want his judgment!" said Madge. "You know that, don't you, Uncle Phil? But I can't see how it can do any harm to have all the best opinions and surgical advice we can get!"

"Yes, yes, my dear girl—that's all right," said her uncle easily. And Aunt Abby, with a doubtful look as though feeling her mistake, continued, "Well, if you say so, Phil." And then, in an anxious, humble tone, "And of course, Madge, you know how I feel. I don't mean to assert my judgment for one minute against yours."

"I want it, Aunt Abby!" As Madge said that,

the tears welled suddenly in her eyes. Oh, what a terrible business it was!

"Now, now, my child, try to get some sleep." And Mrs. Dwight, in a motherly way, put an arm around her. "I declare, it's after one o'clock."

But, for several hours after that, Madge lay sleepless on her bed. At first her eyes felt as though nothing could close them. Again and again her tired mind repeated, "I'm doing my level best! There's nothing else anyone could do!" As the night wore on, she felt relieved at the step which she had taken. "Let the doctors fight it out," she thought. "How can I decide? What do I know?" Gradually she began to relax and drift passively on as before. Her eyes were closed now, and the pictures came—of herself with all this money, here in New York, and then abroad, and again at home in Halesburg. But as her fancy leaped about, suddenly the pictures stopped. For once again, as the certainty came that her brother could not possibly live, she thought of Joe, and everything else seemed all at once to drop away. She lay quite still. She barely breathed.

"How terribly hard it will be for him."

CHAPTER IV

I

THE next morning when the surgeons came, after watching the gaunt white form on the bed, carefully scanning his record and questioning his partner, they decided not to operate. Their reasons were so technical that Madge could make nothing of their talk —except that her brother still had a slim chance, and that, all things considered, it was better to leave him alone. But her relief was swift and deep. How she would have hated to put her Uncle Phil aside and take full responsibility here! She reproached herself for not having trusted his instinct and his common sense. She relied on him now and showed that she did, and her Aunt Abby did the same. Uncle Phil took his triumph quietly, but from the happy light in his eyes you might have thought Gordon was out of danger.

"Madge," he said, "you did quite right; and I'm sorry I tried to stand in your way. You showed good judgment in having them here. Now everyone is satisfied."

Everyone except Joe Evans. Poor Joe looked pretty desperate. He felt that Gordon was going to die. To Madge he was even more appealing than he had been the night before; and she strove to reassure him. Then, as he was leaving, she asked,

"Will you tell Miss O'Brien the result?"

"Yes, I'll call her up at once."

She hesitated, and asked him,

"Have you seen the reviews of her play?"

"No, I forgot to read them."

"Better do it before you call her up."

Joe looked at her with a little smile.

"I reckon you're learning a lot in this town."

"Oh, I'm not so sure I am. Now that I come to think of it, that was a very catty remark. I want to read them myself," she said.

And when he had gone she sent out for the papers, and was soon absorbed in the reviews of Leonora's play. Some praised the piece and others condemned it, but all had nothing but praise for the star. And to Madge there came again a sense of the warm, vivid beauty of this girl, the power of sex, the glamour of fame. It disturbed her and excited her —made death seem cold and far away.

2

Her cousin Ray arrived at noon. About twenty-six, short, brisk and keen, with a gold tooth, a wiry black mustache, and a dimple in one cheek which had greatly annoyed him as a boy—Ray looked upon life with the genial eye of a practical soul who has made up his mind to get his wife into a limousine quick, and feels himself man enough to do it—and to put diamonds on her, too. His cheerful assurance had already made him part owner in the garage where he worked. With automobiles he was a wizard; no proposition could faze him long. He was practical—and he lost no time in beginning to size up the critical situation here. He greeted his mother affectionately, for Ray was always kind to her; but after that he started right in. His voice was low. It was always low. Ray disliked all loudness.

"Well now, Mother, shoot," he said, as he settled himself into a chair. "How's Gordon? Will he make the grade?"

"My dear boy, he's in God's hands."

Her son gave her a dubious look.

"Just how do you mean?"

"His life hangs by a thread."

"Isn't there anything we can do?"

"I'm afraid not, Ray," she answered.

"Well, let's have a look at the facts and see if there's nothing you've overlooked," said her son, as he lit a cigarette. "Just what are we up against?"

He questioned his mother and Uncle Phil. As for Madge, he rather ignored her—treating her as he always had, as a person who just didn't count.

"Well," he said, when he had the facts, "it strikes me Gordon's family have saved his life already—once. If that man Hoyt had had his way, poor G. would have been a dead one now—he'd have slipped right through to the Promised Land. Lucky for him Uncle Phil was here, with his sound horse-sense about such things. Now I say, let's have more of it—more good common sense in this shop and less of this modern city stuff. Here's Mother—one of the finest nurses ever chased a germ away. And she really cares for poor old G. So I say, put her right in charge—with Madge to spell her out, of course—and tell these two thermometer-shakers they can take their things and go. Same way with the flapper, too. We don't need actresses just now, so let her shimmy somewhere else. In other words," he ended, "give Gordon's family a chance."

With a smile of amusement Uncle Phil turned to Madge for a reply.

"Well, Madge, what do you say to this?"

She felt Ray glance at her in surprise.

"I'm afraid I don't agree with you, Ray, on either point," she answered. "Of course Aunt Abby is a fine nurse, but the sort of nursing needed here——"

As she went on to explain in detail, she saw the surprise on his face increase. With his shrewd blue eyes now on herself and now upon the others, Ray was quick to realize the changed position of his cousin.

"As for Miss O'Brien," she went on, "I can't say I like her much—but so long as Gordon's partner tells me he would want her here, I think we had better let her come—at least for the present."

"All right, Madge," he assented. "It's all up to you, of course—and so long as you are satisfied——"

As she felt him nimbly adapting himself to the change in their relations, a faint smile came on her lips. She remembered his manner to her at home, only last week when they met on the street. Kindly enough, but just passing her by. While now—what a difference money did make!

"I must go and see about lunch," she said. And she thought, "I'll ask the nurse to have hers first

and let Aunt Abby sit with Gordon. She'll like that. She'll feel she's doing something."

Madge went into the kitchen, and later to her brother's room.

3

Meanwhile, in the study, Ray was having a talk with his uncle, man to man. Both voices were low.

"How about it, Uncle Phil—have you had time," inquired Ray, "to look into the financial end?"

"Yes, Ray, I've looked into it."

"Located that will?"

"I've got it here."

"No complications?"

"None at all."

"Well," said Ray, "I'm glad of that—for Madge's sake. What kind of a lad is this Joe Evans?"

"Oh, he's all right—honest as the day is long."

"No chance of any indoor sport down there in the office, then."

"Not the slightest."

"What do you think of young O'Brien?"

"Oh, I guess she can't do any harm."

"Pity to have her coming here——"

"Yes, in a way—but so long as Madge——"

"I know—I know." Ray smoked a moment,

sententiously. "Quite a change for our Madge."

"Yes."

"Millions, eh. I wonder what she'll do with it?"

"Time enough to bother about that, if Gordon dies," said Doctor Cable. The future maker of automobiles shot a glance at his uncle and asked,

"What do you think of his chances?"

"About one in ten, I should say."

Ray grew thoughtful for a while.

"About Young Ireland," he went on. "I can't say I'm stuck on the idea of that young flapper hanging around. Never can tell with a girl like that. G. might get conscious at the end—and with her there, and him so weak, poor devil—she might put across some little game that would ball up the whole damn business."

"I know, my boy—I've thought of that—but I doubt if Gordon will come to."

"Still, he might—you never can tell." With puckered brows, Ray smoked some more. "I've been trying to place her. O'Brien—O'Brien. She's never been in the movies, I guess. . . . Say, Uncle, have you any idea how things stood between her and Gordon?"

"They're not engaged——"

"Oh, Hell," said Ray, "you know what I mean." And he put it plain.

"I don't know," said Uncle Phil.

"If he had, it'd make some difference."

"Yes."

"Damn good reason to keep her out—with the women, at least."

"Yes—that's so."

"Well, then—say!" With a sudden idea. "How about this joy-ride?"

"What?"

"Why, Saturday night, when he had the smash. Was she with him?"

"I don't know."

"Haven't you seen his shofer?"

"No."

As Ray looked at his uncle then, the easy genial pity of the New Generation for the Old showed quite plainly on his face.

"Well, it's lucky for you," he said, "there's a garage man in this family."

4

At lunch, Ray said to his cousin,

"Madgy, if you don't object, I'll try to hunt up Gordon's shofer. God knows what's become of that

auto of his, since the smash on Saturday night. And here's one way I can help you—see? It's in my line."

At his obvious desire to please her, she gave him a friendly smile and said,

"Why, yes, Ray, I wish you would."

"That will get *him* out of the way," she thought. "And I'll have Aunt Abby take a nap—and Uncle Phil can sit with Gordon."

She was getting used to this planning now. Already three relatives gathered about, waiting for her slightest wish. And a little question shot into her mind as to how many more would be coming, in the queer rich years ahead. Ray and his vivacious young wife, on shopping bees and theatre sprees; then Aunt Abby, Paul and the girls; and Uncle Phil and his family. Some of them would probably hope to stay with her for weeks at a time. How fit them into her own busy life? Suddenly they rose before her, came so close and grew so real, she could almost look inside and see what each of them wanted to do and be with all this money. Sharply compressing her thin lips, Madge rose from the table. Lunch was over.

"Aunt Abby," she suggested, "suppose you come and take a nap?"

"All right, my child, if you think it best."

5

When Ray came back in an hour or so, Madge was in her brother's room; and Uncle Phil took his nephew directly into the study.

"Well, my boy, what did you find?"

"Not much of anything yet," said Ray. "Fact is, the shofer wouldn't talk. He's a coon, and a pretty wise one at that; and he wasn't loosening up for me till he knew exactly how things stand, and just who's who. But he knows about Madge being boss for the present—for he has been here to ask about G. So I told him Madge wanted the auto to take her out this afternoon. That'll get him kind of used to things."

"The auto is all right, then?"

"Yes. Front axle bent an inch or two, but it's already straightened out; and I've ordered a new mud-guard. They'll have it on this afternoon. It wasn't much of a smash, at that."

As Ray went on to give details of his encounter with "the coon," his uncle listened with amusement. He never had thought much of Ray, and yet he rather liked the boy.

A few minutes later Madge came in.

"Well, Madge, I've found the car," said her cousin, "and it looks in pretty good shape—so I

told the shofer to bring it around. I thought that you and Mother might want to get out for a little fresh air. Been a good deal of a strain on you both—cooped up in here like a couple of hens."

Madge thought a moment.

"Why, yes, Ray, I think that's a good idea—I'll take your mother out for a ride. You and Uncle Phil will be here, of course."

"You bet," said Ray. "You can count on us."

Aunt Abby demurred a bit at first, but was soon persuaded. She put on her old fur shoulder cape, and was ready when the car arrived.

"I'd feel a little easier, Madge, if Ray went with us," she proposed. "That is, of course, if you don't mind. Uncle Phil will be right here, you know."

"All right, Aunt Abby—certainly." And they went down to the street.

Madge had quite a thrill when she saw the car. It was such a lovely big one—and all so gleaming, smoothly rich. The smart young darky in livery was so plainly watching her out of the corner of his eye, as his probable future employer. With an awkward smile, she helped her Aunt Abby to get in, and sank beside her into the seat; and she felt the leaping power beneath, as the big car smoothly moved away. Ray had climbed into the front seat.

When they came to Fifth Avenue, near the Park, he told the chauffeur to turn down town, and smiling back at them he said,

"Let's show Mother a little life."

6

In the next few minutes, sitting there, a curious look came in Madge's eyes. Why did it all appear so changed? She had seen Fifth Avenue before, a dozen times. "Yes, but years ago," she thought, "and it keeps growing all the time!" But the change was rather in herself. For this street is really nothing at all except shop windows, flesh and clothes—while it is a thousand different things to a thousand different pairs of eyes. It is brilliant—it is dull as lead; it is gay and amusing—stupid and coarse; a lonely place, a terrible place—a friendly, human, lovable place; a region of enchanted dreams—a river of hard and greedy eyes. But the commonest miracle of all is the way in a twinkling it is changed to some citizen of this lusty land who unexpectedly finds himself possessed of what to him is enormous wealth—ten dollars or ten million.

Madge looked and saw a thoroughfare tumultuous with color and sound, and moment by moment she felt an increasing friendly curiosity in the number-

less passers-by. She had been curious before, but on those visits in the past it had all been as remote as were these big handsome shops from the Emporium at home. Now the great windows on either side all seemed to be saying to her, "Come in. We are ready to teach you the joy there is in being warmly and richly alive!" Suddenly she saw herself as the active owner of one of these stores—sending her buyers all over the world to gather countless exquisite things; and learning, learning, learning—studying the public taste, and even moulding it at times. Watching the women and young girls who came pouring out of the doorways, she wondered what they had bought inside; and presently she found herself making quick guesses about each one. Some were so atrociously dressed, she could see at a glance that Money, the Grand High Joker, would always make them comic and cheap. There were others who brought an admiring gleam into her observant blue-grey eyes. So surely had they judged themselves. There was exquisite taste and imagination, daring, and seduction here. But suddenly a little frown of annoyance and disillusionment swept over Madge's face; for a woman beautifully dressed passed slowly by her in a car, and her voice was nasal, rasping.

"How stupid of her not to think of that, too!"

Madge had taken no small pride in her own clear, low articulation, and she eyed the glittering stranger for a moment with contempt. But then she yielded herself again to the fascinations of it all. On foot or in their limousines, off they went by perfect thousands. Where were they going? Pictures teemed into her mind of what they would do this afternoon. How amusing and gay it was! In a smart town car which passed her, she caught a glimpse of two young girls in perfect gales of laughter, one of them with her small gloved hands making quick little gestures as she talked. "I wonder where *they* are going?" asked Madge. And then, with a grim little smile, "And where would I be going? I don't know a soul in town. Where would I even make a beginning?" Inwardly she laughed at herself, and again she let her fancy fly.

Then something hard, compelling, real, drew her back from the gleaming castles in air to the grim present and the past. It was the face of her aunt at her side—the lines of worry left by the years, and the hard eagerness of to-day. Hard? Yes, hard—with anxious strain. In this crisis which might mean so much to her and to her children, the mask of every day was gone, the face was naked, and

Madge could feel the swiftly changing moods inside. She guessed that the thoughts of her aunt were now here, now back at home with her three girls, and again were darting far, far back into the bleak existence of a country minister's wife. "All this has gone on day and night—while I, for nearly fifty years——" With a sigh Aunt Abby relaxed a bit and returned to these present sights and sounds. A clever seamstress all her life, there was a sharp, curious hunger now in her eyes as they kept leaping about—critical here, and there giving praise. More than once she started to point out some dainty suit or hat to Madge, but each time she restrained herself. For this was no time to talk of such things.

But no such restraint embarrassed her son. Always affectionate with his mother, he kept looking back with a smile; and with all the assurance gained in previous brief visits here, he pointed out and named for her the big shops and the homes of millionaires. Only once he showed his ignorance.

"What church is that, Ray?" his mother asked. He answered cheerfully,

"Search me, Mother. I'm not quite up on churches here."

In a caustic tone, Aunt Abby rejoined, "Not many people seem to be. And it's a great pity—when you

think of the good work which might be done with all this money rolling about. It seems as though the rest of us just work and scrimp our lives away, so that these New Yorkers can riot in wealth!"

Ray laughed at that.

"Riot is good!" he cried. "Pretty good, Mother!"

But Madge gave a little squeeze to her hand. And at this, in an instant Aunt Abby turned, she squeezed her niece's hand in reply, and her small eyes grew bright with tears. Then the anxious look came in them again; and noticing it, Madge told herself, "Now she's thinking what she can get out of this —not for herself at all, poor dear, but for those eternal children!" And sure enough, Mrs. Dwight soon began to speak of Paul and the three girls and to wonder what they were doing at home. Madge grew sympathetic now, and by an occasional word or a question encouraged her to talk on and on, and to give hints of her wakening dreams.

But Madge's own thoughts were right here in New York. The car had stopped in a traffic jam, and in a wide shop window she spied a small blue evening gown which shimmered with gold. Instantly she told herself, "There! I could wear that!" The certainty of it was so sharp, it brought the color into her cheeks. But the next moment, inside the

shop, a small pretty woman smartly dressed came to the window with one of the clerks—and now she was pointing to the gown. Great Heavens! She was going to buy it! And Madge almost cried out to her, "Oh, don't do that! I saw it first! It's mine, it's mine!"

"What's the matter, Madge?" she heard from her aunt. With a quick, unnatural smile she said,

"Oh, nothing, Aunt Abby, nothing at all. You were speaking of Ray's new baby, weren't you?"

Soon she had her relative rambling on, about the life in Halesburg, so that she herself could continue to build the picture of herself in New York. Friends? Oh, they'd come—they always did when you had so much money. "Besides," she thought, "I'm smart enough. I'm not a perfect little goop." She would join a club, to begin with, and grow active on committees there—generous with her money, of course; and so she'd make friends, and they in time would invite her to their homes. She saw herself ranging freely from large, handsome houses to cosy, small apartments—warmly welcomed wherever she went. And meanwhile, watching women who passed, she asked, "How long have *you* been here? What are you up to? Married or single? How old are you?" She grew interested in trying to guess their

ages, and she soon decided that most of them were her own age or even older. Thirty-two had been old in Halesburg—here apparently it was young. As she eyed one gracious, smiling young dame, she thought, "I'll bet you're forty if you're a day. How do you do it?" To herself she felt a new youth coming.

Then suddenly she heard Ray's voice. He had turned on his seat and was asking her,

"Suppose anything happens to poor old G. Would you keep this auto, Madge?"

She winced at the bad taste of it. Right in front of the chauffeur, too! What could Ray be thinking of?

"I don't know, Ray," she answered. "I don't care to think of that. Now suppose we go to the Park."

"All right, Madge," was his cheerful reply. "Just as you say. We'll be there in a minute."

Engrossed in her thoughts and intent on her watching, she had not noticed that long ago they had turned and come back up the Avenue. As they entered the Park in the autumn dusk, she leaned back in deep relief, and her Aunt Abby did the same.

"Oh, how nice this is!" sighed Mrs. Dwight.

"You bet it is!" agreed her son, and he gave her

a smile which said, "And you're going to have some of this, Little Mother."

She settled back and half closed her eyes, and for some time nobody said a word. Through the bare tree branches Madge saw distant specks of light; by hundreds and by thousands, from tall buildings all about, they twinkled at her through the haze. And now in the Park the lights came on and made a purple shining road that went winding off into the night. In and out and up hill and down the big car smoothly made its way. Other cars kept passing. In one she saw a man and a girl with their heads close together; she heard a vibrant teasing laugh. Then they were gone. On a bridle path close by the road she spied a young girl cantering home. "I'd love to ride!" she told herself. She had always loved fine horses; she knew a good deal about them, too. And what a horse she might have now! She wondered if Joe Evans rode. "No, I can't see him riding here." Indeed, she almost heard him say, in his soft Southern voice, "I reckon this kind of ridin' in parks is a little too lady-like for me." What he wanted was to go back to a ranch—as soon as he had money enough. Well, there would be money now. Just for an instant she saw them both running a big ranch out West. But she laughed at herself

impatiently. Queer, how this money was taking her fancy flying all over the face of the earth! They passed an old lady out for a drive in a small, old-fashioned, open cab. How nice she looked in it! Madge recalled a picture she'd seen of a broad, gay Paris thoroughfare with any number of cabs like that. "I'd certainly go to Paris!" she thought.

On the front seat, Ray and the chauffeur were talking in low voices now; but she did not notice them.

Suddenly she started forward—sat bolt upright, quivering. For with a clanging of its gong an ambulance came rushing by.

CHAPTER V

I

WHEN they came back to the apartment, Madge found her uncle quietly reading. There had been no change, he said. Just for a moment she went and looked in at the door of the cool, dim room, at the motionless white figure there. No, there was nothing at all she could do. So she went to her room to rest. On the way, she heard Ray and Uncle Phil in the study. Though the door was closed, it seemed to her that their voices had a hungry sound. In an instant, without warning, she felt unhappy and unstrung.

"Oh, to have it over—settled one way or the other!" she thought.

But after getting off her clothes, she grew quiet again and lay on her bed quite motionless, her mind a blank. Presently there was a tap at the door, and Aunt Abby came into the room, in her old blue dressing gown.

"Madge," she said, in an undertone, "I don't see

why we have to have that chit of a nurse sit with us at meals. Why can't she wait till the night nurse comes and then go and get her supper at home?"

"Oh, Auntie," said Madge, wearily, "does it make any difference?"

"Yes, it does—it's a time when we want to be alone, and keep the family to itself! And I'll bet you that if we were city folks she wouldn't even presume to suggest it! I tell you," said little Mrs. Dwight, "I won't be trodden under foot by actresses and nurses here!"

Madge smiled at her and suggested,

"Why don't you go and ask Uncle Phil? He probably knows what the custom is."

"Very well, I will."

Her aunt went away, but soon returned with a gloomy air.

"Yes," she announced, "he says they expect it."

And obviously Miss Cochran did, for as soon as dinner was announced she came to the dining room with the rest.

2

Feeling her presence, the talk at first was rather constrained. At the very start, when by lifelong habit Doctor Cable bowed his head and began to

ask the blessing—"For what we are about to receive——" he stopped for just an instant, and Madge felt an unpleasant thrill go all around the table. And though at once he went smoothly on—"may the Good Lord make us thankful"—still for a moment longer they all kept their eyes on their plates. When she lifted hers, Madge thought she detected a slight smile on Miss Cochran's lips. She frowned, and eyed the forks and knives, and wondered which of them to use in the courses which were coming. She was sorry she had not told old Abe to give them a plain, simple meal. Evidently anxious to please, he was going to serve a regular dinner. "Is that what he thinks of us?" she asked; and when he inquired a little later if they would have sherry or Scotch, she started to answer, "Nothing at all." But she noticed the look on her cousin's face, and asked instead,

"Would you two men like something to drink?"

"No, thank you, Madge," said Uncle Phil; but Ray answered, "Whiskey, please." And as the drink was poured for him, he said, with a genial upward glance, "Just leave it on the table, Abe." Avoiding his mother's look of displeasure, he cheerfully remarked to his uncle, "This town don't seem very dry. I guess the law's just for the rest of us." And

then to Aunt Abby he proposed, "Don't you want some sherry, Mother? It would kind of tonic you up."

"No, thank you, Ray. This soup is tonic enough for me. It's perfectly delicious, Madge."

Gradually, as the meal progressed, they forgot the young nurse sitting there, and their talk all centered on themselves—as the family feeling rose again. They spoke of some members dead and gone, and of others who were living out west and should perhaps be notified. They came back to Gordon then and continued to build the image of the lovable boy they had known. And through all the anecdotes ran the thought, "He was one of us. It was out of us, and with our help, that he rose to this." Aunt Abby had mothered him when he was small; Uncle Phil had given him his first job; and years later, in the fall of 1914, when he came up to Halesburg, it was through his uncle's endorsement that Gordon had been able to borrow from the local bank the money he needed in order to buy options on three forlorn old sailing vessels rotting at a dock in Troy. So his fortune was begun; for, as Ray expressed it, "Those three old sea girlies were certainly some War Brides for G." He had sold at a profit and had gone on to buy ship after

ship—sailers, steamers, neglected old hulks—until by the time of the submarine crisis he was the owner of quite a fleet.

"But the thing I like to think of best," said Aunt Abby, placidly, "is the way, when his country called, Gordon threw away his chance to make a princely fortune, and volunteered in the first week. Of course," she added the next moment, with an affectionate smile at her son, "he was fixed so he could. He wasn't like Ray, with a wife and baby to support. But I'm proud that when the need grew great Ray answered, 'I'm ready, Uncle Sam'—like all the rest of the boys in our family. I think we have a *right* to be proud. Madge, too, with her splendid Red Cross work—and Uncle Phil, and Paul and the girls."

She was going on to give the entire family honor roll, but Ray cut her off by telling of his finding Gordon wounded in a big hospital in France.

"And what do you think he asked me first—right off the bat?" inquired Ray, whose tongue had been loosened by the Scotch. "'How about the U. Boats?' See? G. was licking the Kaiser all righty—doing his bit like a regular man; but he wasn't forgetting those ships of his, those little old War

Bride painted girls! No, sir, not for a minute, he wasn't! And when he got back to God's Own Country, how he did ride in on the boom!"

"It seems perfectly marvellous to me," said Aunt Abby, with a sigh, "for a man to make millions—all in a year!"

"He took some awful chances—you bet! Lucky for him he got out of ships before the crash!" her son declared. As he talked, Ray had been eating fast. From the decanter before him, he now poured another drink, ignoring his mother's reproachful eyes.

As the plates were changed for the salad course, they recalled the presence of the nurse, and there was silence for a time. But it could not last, for beneath it ran the thought of Gordon's wealth, soon to be family property; and not only Ray but his mother and uncle were soon talking as before. Madge watched them. Yes, in her cousin's case it was partly due to whiskey; but the others had taken nothing at all. They had no need of drink, she thought. The tonic of the situation was so strong that it was a strain to keep down the hopes and images—even for little Mrs. Dwight, who spoke with a forced composure but whose gentle voice was tremulous and whose grey head kept nodding from

sheer excitement. The birth mark on her temple could be seen distinctly now.

"I've never given up faith in the boy," Uncle Phil was saying. "No matter how some people talked, I've always felt that sooner or later a large, generous share of his wealth would come back home to Halesburg, that he would do something big for his town."

He had hoped it would be a hospital, he said, which would bear the family name—" writ large for every man to see." And as he went on to speak of what untold good a few hundred thousand dollars might do in the service of humanity, Madge could feel him picturing the small house of mercy more and more clearly in his mind—with himself in charge, of course. Small? Not very. For as he talked on, the hospital grew larger, larger. There were to be several doctors and a score of nurses, it appeared. Nor was it to be a mere local affair. He told of what the Mayo Brothers had done in their little town out west. And presently, with a slight start, Madge recalled that long ago it had been her uncle's cherished dream to build a great hospital which should win a national fame. The dream had been buried all these years, while he was running a drug-store and drifting into a settled old age. But still

it was there, it had never died; and it had risen now with a force which took all the smooth quiet out of his voice and made him forget to wipe the crumbs from his large, flowing, soft moustache.

But glancing around the table Madge saw that the others were not listening.

Aunt Abby had interrupted to say that Ruth, her second daughter, had always wanted to be a trained nurse. But abruptly she fell silent; and as Uncle Phil talked on, Madge could see in her aunt's bright eyes how her thoughts were racing on to the time when every one of her daughters would have children of her own, and the merry little boys and girls would be coming to visit their grandmother in the lovely old house on the river bank. In her face was a warm, eager light. Madge thought of the girls at home this evening. If their mother was so excited, what a state must they be in! She could almost hear their strong, clear voices, almost see their hungry eyes—painting *their* pictures, dreaming *their* dreams—as they sat talking—waiting for a telegram—waiting for the new life to begin! Suddenly it was as though they all came crowding right into the room, each one of them queerly tense, each one naked and revealed as in a sudden glare of light, and whispering, "Millions! Millions! All this

money will soon be yours! You can make our lives all over—take us to Europe, buy us clothes, give us husbands, homes and children! You'll be a different woman, Madge—you'll live in a perfectly dazzling world! Remember us! Remember us!"

As her fancy started to soar away up vistas that were all her own, into her thinking by degrees came the incisive voice of her cousin. Ray had been talking of his garage. She had not listened, but all at once she looked up with a jerk of her head. Garage? No—a whole factory now! Ray was making automobiles! After speaking in a critical tone of Henry Ford and his swift success, Ray began to tell them of the "auto" of his dreams. For years it had lain in the back of his mind.

"I took it to bed with me every night and nursed it like a new born babe! And believe me, when I get my chance, that auto will be *some baby!*" he cried.

He lifted his glass with a quivering hand, eyes fairly ablaze with his vision of whirring wheels and grease and din. But catching the look on his mother's face, his jaw dropped, he came to himself; and remembering their postiion here, he relapsed, and rather sheepishly he began to eat his ice cream. There was a brief silence. Miss Cochran rose.

"If you'll excuse me, Miss Cable," she said, "I'd better be going back to him now. Miss Field is a little late to-night."

"No change since I was in there last?" inquired Madge. The young nurse smiled.

"Yes—I think he's a little better."

Each one of them seemed to give a start.

"Oh—that's good," Madge answered.

3

In the silence which came after the departure of the nurse, Madge caught Ray and Uncle Phil exchanging glances in a way that plainly had something to do with herself. She remembered the hungry sound of their voices in the study before dinner. Now what had *they* been cooking up? She waited till Ray had finished his cream; and then, recalling a sentence in a novel she had read, she rose and said,

"Suppose that we have our coffee brought into the other room."

In the living room, while they sat waiting for the coffee to come in, Ray picked up an evening paper. There were several lying about, for just before dinner Madge had been reading some more accounts

of Leonora's opening night. Ray's keen eye soon lit on her name.

"Hello, folks, listen to this," he said. " 'Leonora O'Brien Stars in New Play.' Do you want to hear it?"

"Yes," said his mother.

"All righty—here goes." And Ray began: " 'Whether or not the play of last night is a success, Leonora O'Brien has gone far toward winning her place as an emotional actress and comedienne of no average abilities.' "

As he read on, his mother sat bolt upright in her chair, with her small eyes fixed on her niece in a curious way which made Madge ask, "Why is she watching me like that?" Old Abe came in. Madge poured the coffee. Ray finished his reading, took a cup, sat down and lit a cigarette.

"Well," said his mother, after a pause, "that ought to settle it, I suppose."

Madge turned her head.

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Could you be a successful comedy actress when you knew the man you loved was lying at the point of death?"

"I'm not an actress. She is," said Madge.

At that, she heard a chuckle from Ray.

"You're dead right there—she's an actress, all righty—every minute of her life." He drew on his cigarette and said, "Been acting up to Gordon, too."

Madge threw a keen look at him.

"Just what do you mean by that, Ray?" she demanded.

He glanced at her and then at his uncle, with a far from easy manner. "What's the matter with him?" she asked. Doctor Cable went to the door and closed it, after looking into the hall. Then he came back and sat down and said,

"I guess you'd better tell them, Ray."

Ray was fairly scowling now. As he glanced at his mother, his whole manner was that of a man who has something melodramatic to say and hates to say it.

"To be honest," he began, "I can't say I'm stuck on the job. It's not exactly the kind of stuff you're used to hearing, Mother. Madge neither. And it's not in my line. But——" he paused and scowled again. "The point is that back at home, in that little old garage of mine, I've learned enough to teach me that if you want to get right down to the bed rock of a man's life, you want to see his shofer. So I did it—in this case." Nervously he inhaled again, blew out the smoke with an air of

distaste, and continued earnestly, "I don't want you to think I'm sitting in judgment on poor old G. He was simply human—a man with a wad, and unattached. But—well, if you want 'em, the facts are these.

"I found the coon close-mouthed at first; but after the ride this afternoon, when he got to know me better and to see just how things stood, he loosened up like a regular fellah. He's been Gordon's shofer about two months. Always changing bosses—here one day and gone the next—they don't get attached so you'd notice it. So, as I said, he opened up and let the cat right out of the bag. First, he told of the accident Saturday night. It was along about one a. m.—up along the Concourse, just this side of Fordham Road. It seems that our young flapper friend was in the car, and there were two or three others, besides, from the theatre—quite a party. Evans was probably in it, too—though I didn't go into that with the coon, nor into details of the smash. All that I was after was this young O'Brien girl—I wanted to get her number. It took some careful handling—but after he had strung me along for quite a while, the shofer said that a good many nights in the last few weeks Gordon took the lady out—with a bunch of others sometimes—but more

often it was a two-some, which lasted on right through the night. And—well, I guess you can imagine the rest of it, if you want to."

"We don't want to," Madge cut in. She felt their glances turn to her, and she reddened slightly; she felt confused. But her voice was hard and cold. "It seems to me, Ray," she said to her cousin, "that through this ignorant negro you've been digging up what is nobody's business but Gordon's."

Ray flushed angrily and rose.

"Oh, well, if you want to take it like that—of course there's nothing more to be said!"

"Wait, Ray, wait," said Uncle Phil; and to Madge he added evenly, "You ought to know Ray well enough to realize he wouldn't be telling such things, at such a time, unless it had some real bearing on Gordon's case and our action here."

"How can it have?"

"Listen. Go on, Ray."

"Well," said Ray, "it's simply this. He gave me the names of a number of road houses—see?—out around the city—where they spent the night together, registering as man and wife." With a scowl Ray lit a fresh cigarette. "I guess that's all I want to tell."

There was silence. Then Aunt Abby said,

"I should think it was enough!"

"Yes, I don't think we need hear any more," Madge put in. But her aunt went on,

"A nice sort of girl to be coming here—to his very death bed!"

With a gleam of understanding, Madge turned to her uncle.

"And you believe now we should keep her from coming. Is that it, Uncle Phil?"

He looked at her steadily.

"What do *you* think?"

The directness of his question made her draw back. She looked away.

"I don't quite know."

"Don't *know?*" cried her aunt.

"No, Aunt Abby," she replied, in a hard, vexed tone. Disgusted and angry, her thoughts went to Joe Evans now—or rather, they returned to him; for ever since her cousin had said, "Evans was probably in it, too"—she had found it hard to keep her mind clear. Was that the sort of man he was? Midnight rides with actresses? Perhaps he, too, had a little friend, some cheap pal of Leonora's! How friendly he had been to the girl, taking her part in these last days, though he knew all the time

what kind she was! Oh, how disgusting men could be! . . . Then all at once she refused to believe it. "No," she decided, "I don't believe he had anything to do with it!" Aloud she said, "I wonder if Mr. Evans knew?"

"You bet he knew," Ray answered. "You can be sure there have been some wild parties—right in this room. I shouldn't wonder a bit," he went on, with a faint expectant light in his eyes, "if there had been more than one little two-some right in that chair where Mother is now."

Aunt Abby bounced up, but seeing his smile she glared at him, then recovered herself.

"Well," she said, "what's done is done! But——"

Madge interrupted. "Exactly, Aunt Abby," she said, coldly. "It's their own business—Gordon's and Mr. Evans'. If they did care for that sort of thing, I don't see it concerns us in the least!" Her voice was a bit unsteady; she felt as though she were going to cry. Angrily she restrained herself.

Uncle Phil spoke up, smoothly and kindly.

"I quite agree with you there," he said. "After all, it's a free country—and a man's life is his own affair. But his death belongs to his family." Madge winced at this, but he went on. "It seems to me

that from now on we'd better just drop this young woman out. We've tried to be fair to her, Lord knows. Though she was infernally rude to us, we have let her come here night after night. But now that we know the facts in the case, I should say that the kindest thing to poor Gordon is just to forget her and put her aside."

"Yes, Phil," said Aunt Abby, "I think that is eminently wise."

As Madge looked from one to another then, she had a sense of the grim, sure power of Family here. Except for Aunt Abby's outburst, there had been no excitement. There was no need. Leonora was simply to be put aside. "Well, she deserves it! Serves her right!" Madge thought, with a thrill of satisfaction. But a moment later, she added, "No, it isn't fair!"

"How do we know," she asked them, "that this negro spoke the truth?"

"He seemed to be sure enough of his facts," said Ray. "When I nailed him down, he gave me the places and the dates—all in the last six weeks or so. Of course I can follow it up, if you like——"

"No," she said, quickly, "there's no need of that."

"You mean that you agree with us?" inquired Doctor Cable.

"Not exactly," Madge replied. She did not want to decide it yet. "Even supposing this is true, how do we know they didn't mean to marry?"

"You have her own word for that. And if you will allow me, Madge," said her uncle, in a fatherly tone, "I'd like to make sure that she has no chance of defrauding you here."

"How do you mean?"

Then Ray spoke up:

"I guess I can make that clear enough. The girl's a vamp and she got poor G. exactly where she wanted him. Now she wants to be with him alone. Why? For all practical purposes, the poor devil's like a corpse—and flappers don't like to shimmy with stiffs. No, sir, cold cash—that's what she's after. Watchful waiting is her game. The minute Gordon comes to his senses, even if he's a dying man, she'll get a statement out of him that'll put her right in your shoes! God knows what letters she has, as it is. You can bet she has a shyster lawyer coaching her on every move!"

Doctor Cable had listened in quiet amusement. Now with a twinkle he put in,

"I guess you go to the movies, Ray."

"I don't have to. I run a garage."

"Well," said Uncle Phil, easily, "there's nothing

to be excited about. The whole control is still in our hands." He turned to his niece. "The situation is simply this. Here's a young 'emotional actress' who has played on Gordon's affections so successfully that the money which might have been spent in his home town for useful ends has been lavished on her. How, as you say, is none of our business. I've nothing to say whatever against her morals or her life. Still, it's a little too much to expect us to help her now to rob you, Madge——"

"I don't believe she means to!"

"I feel pretty sure she does, my dear, and that we'd better keep her out."

"I don't want to!" Madge replied. "Do you mean to say," she demanded, "that she would go in there with a will, when Gordon was dying, and ask him to sign it?"

"That wouldn't be necessary," he said. He hesitated, and went on, "I got an old lawyer friend of mine on the telephone this afternoon." Madge gave him a sharp look of surprise, but he continued smoothly, "I put a similar case to him and asked what a shrewd attorney would advise such a woman to do. And it appears the course is plain. *Donata causa mortis* was, I believe, the term he used—which in plain English means that a dying man can convey

his property to another by a simple verbal statement of his desire to that effect—in the presence of a third party, of course, acting as a witness. In this case, it would be the nurse—who is more than friendly to Miss O'Brien."

Madge stared at him.

"All right," she said, in a low voice. "If he really wants to give her his money, what right have we to interfere?"

"None whatever," he replied, "if Gordon really wants to. But speaking as a physician now, I can assure you, my dear girl, that if Gordon comes to, before he dies, his mind will be blurred and his will like a feather. How can we tell what he really wants? He will not be himself at all. And yet he may appear to be—so that what he says may easily be held valid in court. Is it right to let her see him, then, and excite him to any such act in her favor?"

"Oh, I don't know—and I do so hate to have anything to do with this! It's so terribly hard to see what's right!" she answered. But her tone had weakened, and this her uncle was prompt to detect.

"Exactly. What *is* right?" he asked. "That's what we all of us want to know. But we are Gordon's family, Madge—what right has this girl com-

pared to ours? What need has she? Think of your Aunt Abby here, who mothered Gordon as a boy—what a little money would mean in *her* life." Disregarding Aunt Abby's murmur of protest, Uncle Phil went steadily on: "Think of all the good you could do in our town—and in your own life—in a thousand ways. For it is no flattery to say that you are just the sort of woman, able, smart and generous, who would make splendid use of wealth. Then think of this young actress, as you have seen her here at night—in silks, bedizened and perfumed. It's easy to think how she would scatter Gordon's money about town. But I don't want to think of her, or of that side of Gordon's life. The boy is dying. Let's be kind. And one thing seems so clear to me. This is no time to have such a woman here as one of the family."

Madge sat silent, trembling.

"Well?" he asked her. "What do you say?"

"Perhaps you're right. I want to think it over."

"You haven't much time, have you?" from Ray. "She may be coming before long."

Madge glanced angrily at the clock and felt how time was pushing her. The telephone rang. Ray went, and came back.

"For you," he said. "It's that man, Evans."

"Oh." She went to the telephone; and listening they heard her say, "Yes? . . . Oh, good evening . . . The nurse says he's a little better to-night." Her voice was cold. "Yes—so am I. . . . No, thank you, Mr. Evans, there's nothing whatever you can do." She hung up the receiver. The sound of Joe's voice had brought sharply back that wave of anger and disgust at the thought of the life he and Gordon had led. She came back into the living room.

"Is he coming to-night?" Aunt Abby asked.

"I don't think so," Madge replied.

"He may, you know, with his friend, Miss O'Brien."

Madge gave her an impatient glance.

"He won't do that, Aunt Abby." And turning to Doctor Cable, she said, "I quite agree with you, Uncle Phil—I mean, I do for the present at least. Gordon may get much better soon—we all of us hope and pray that he will. And then we can follow his wishes here. But so long as he is unconscious now, I don't see why we should let this girl come in and order us all about, as though she owned him body and soul, and we were just dirt beneath her feet."

"Good," said her uncle. "Then that's settled."

He patted her shoulder approvingly, and with an

expression of relief picked up an evening paper and sank back into a chair.

"That's so sensible, my dear," said Aunt Abby, gently.

"You bet it is," put in her son. He had picked up a paper, too; and his mother took her knitting, and presently Madge did the same. For a long time a grim quiet prevailed—broken only by the sound of a crumpled newspaper page or by the noise from the street below.

Madge was still quivering a bit. As she bent over her needle, her thoughts went back to Sunday evening, when she had been here alone. How far behind her it seemed now! Looking restlessly up from her work, her glance was caught by the face of her aunt—relaxing for a moment but then tightening again. How plain her birthmark showed tonight. Yes, now the crisis must be near! Thank goodness!

Doctor Cable got up and went out, and she knew he had gone to her brother's room. He came back, sat down and lit a cigar. She could see his hand tremble slightly. Ray glanced from his paper up at the clock. It was almost eleven now. Soon that wretched girl would be here! Madge dreaded her coming and the thought of how they were to handle

her. But the composed, steady face of her uncle seemed to say,

"Leave this to me. It will be done quietly—no fuss and feathers. I'll give her no chance to make a scene."

And the whole group gave an appearance like that—grim and quiet, practical, determined there should be no fuss, no noisy melodrama here.

4

When at last the bell was heard to ring, nobody moved but Uncle Phil.

"I'll go," he said, and went out to the door. The next moment they heard her voice in the hall:

"Good evening! I understand he is better!"

"No," he replied, "there is no marked change."

"But—I don't understand how that can be!" Leonora exclaimed, as she came in. "Good evening!" she said to the others. "Good evening, Miss O'Brien," said Madge, but the girl turned back on Doctor Cable, and went on excitedly, "The nurse telephoned me he was better to-night!"

"Did she? I don't agree with her." His voice had a slightly ominous ring. "She seems to be quite a friend of yours."

"I'll go and talk to her myself!"

But as she started, he stood in her way.

"I don't think you had better see Gordon tonight."

A sudden silence.

"Why not, may I ask?"

"Simply, my dear young woman, because I'm a physician and I do not deem it wise."

"But—you can't keep me out like that! You're not the physician in charge of this case!"

And she turned indignantly to Madge. But before the latter could answer, Doctor Cable held up his hand.

"I'm Gordon's uncle," he replied, "and so far as you are concerned, I represent his family here."

"His family? What do you mean by that? You're strangers—every one of you! You mean nothing to him, one way or the other! I tell you that I shall insist on seeing him—at once, if you please!"

"I'm afraid that is impossible." Uncle Phil's voice was still steady and low. "Now don't let us have any scene about this. We don't want to be unreasonable, but there is one point to be made very plain. Before you can keep coming here, giving orders as though you owned this man, you will have to show us good reason why."

Leonora's dark face went suddenly pale, her big black eyes grew furious, and with quivering lips she asked,

"What right have you to——"

He cut in: "We have the only possible right. My nephew is at the point of death, and we are his next of kin—that is, we are, so far as we know. If you have anything to tell us—of any marriage or promise of marriage——"

"I'll tell you nothing of the kind! All that is necessary for you to know is that Gordon cares for me, that he wants me here, that he doesn't want you!"

"How do we know that? He is unconscious."

"Has he been unconscious all these years? Has he ever shown he wanted you? Or even you?" she cried to Madge. Madge grew rigid, set her teeth. In a low, hard voice she said,

"Oh, how stupid you are to talk like this!"

"Phil," said Aunt Abby, sharply, "I think that we have heard enough!"

"Oh, have you?" Leonora cried. As she turned to Mrs. Dwight, her voice was loud and shaking. "We'll see about that!"

"Very well, young woman, we'll see about that—

if you must have it so," said Uncle Phil. "Will you take a seat?"

"No, thank you! Where is the telephone?"

"What do you want the telephone for?" inquired Ray, with irony. "Want to get your lawyer here?"

"No—I want Joe Evans! He'll make it perfectly plain, I think, that Gordon wants me—wants me here!"

"I'm afraid he couldn't, Miss O'Brien," Doctor Cable answered. "He could only tell us what Gordon wanted a week ago—when he was on the crest of the wave—and that is quite another thing. The question we have to decide is this: Would he want to see you now, when he is at the point of death? Mr. Evans is his business partner—nothing more. We are Gordon's family—and any decision of this kind rests entirely in our hands."

"It does, does it? We'll see about that!" But she said it this time mechanically; and as she stood trembling there, her face showed a dawning realization of the power of this group—so grim and silent, watching her. Uncle Phil went smoothly on:

"I've no doubt that Mr. Evans is well versed in Gordon's business affairs, and even in his recent life. But this is a moment which concerns not only my nephew's last few years but his entire existence,

from the time when he was a boy—when we all knew him intimately. Habits and moral standards formed at home in those early days have a way of coming back to a man when he lies so close to death. I know, for I was a physician for years. In the full tide of his career a young man will want one thing—but suddenly facing eternity he will want another. This is a moment of that kind—and neither a business partner, nor even a young companion so alluring as yourself, can judge of his wishes at such a time. That is for his family."

She stared at him.

"Now," he said, "don't you think you had better be saying good-night?"

"No—no—I don't think that——"

Suddenly she burst into tears and dropped into a chair, with her face in her hands. Madge was standing close to Ray, and she heard him say in disgust to his mother,

"Now for some regular movie stuff!"

An angry flush came on Madge's face. Confused, ashamed and excited, she went quickly to the girl, and in a voice hard with strain she said,

"Now will you please, please make an effort to—to be quiet this quietly! I know it isn't easy—but all we ask is to have it made clear! If you and my

brother cared for each other—if you can really make us feel that he cares for you more than anyone else——"

"Oh, he does—he does—he does!"

"But in what way?" asked Uncle Phil sternly, again taking matters into his hands. "You don't claim to be his wife, nor even that you are engaged to him. And yet we find that on not one but a number of occasions you have let him take you to little out-of-the-way hotels, where you registered as man and wife!"

Leonora sprang up with a furious cry; but before she could answer, Ray cut in:

"How about the eighth of October—Sunday night—at the B— Hotel? I guess you know the place I mean!" And sharply he named several more, reading them off from the back of an envelope, on which places and dates were scrawled. She looked at him with blazing eyes; but she let him go on, and she seemed to Madge to be making a desperate effort to think of something she could do. At the end, with a smile of disdain, she said,

"Oh, what's the use of trying to make such people understand?"

"Such people indeed!" Aunt Abby cried. "Now, Miss O'Brien, you'd better go! This solemn hour

is no time for a woman like yourself to be here! If my poor misguided nephew ever wanted you at all—it was like—like——"

"—a cocktail," Ray added. And that finished her. With a last glare at them, she cried,

"If he lives, you people will pay for this!" And then she made quickly for the door. As Uncle Phil followed her, he replied,

"We're quite ready to pay anything—so long as we know we are doing what seems to us to be wise and right."

The next moment the door slammed in the hall, and coming back into the room, he said, "Well, that's done——" with a breath of relief. There was a brief silence.

"Do you suppose she'll make any other move?" asked Mrs. Dwight, uneasily.

"No, I don't think so," he replied.

"There ain't a thing she can do," said Ray. "You managed that mighty well, Uncle Phil." And the expression in Ray's face said, "Pretty good for an old fogy."

In a moment Madge asked, in a low voice,

"I wonder if by any chance he did really mean to marry her?"

"Marry her? No," said Uncle Phil; and with a

patient look he asked, "Don't you think we have had discussion enough?"

"Seems kind of rough on poor old G.," said Ray, in a reproachful tone, "to be talking all this about him just now—washing his dirty linen——"

"Quite right, Ray," his mother agreed. "And I for one am glad to be done with it and to forget. Besides, I think we're all of us pretty thoroughly tired out."

"Yes, Auntie, and I'm going to bed," said Madge, in a voice of weariness.

"That's wise, my dear child," her uncle approved, "try to get what rest you can. I'm not sleepy myself—you can count on me. I'll be sitting up still for an hour or two, in case there is any need of my help. And I know we can depend on the nurse."

"Can we?" Ray asked, quickly. "How about her 'phoning the flapper to-night that Gordon was better? Don't that look as though she were in her pay?"

"Ray," replied his uncle, with a quizzical look on his face, "your garage philosophy has done very well to-day, but don't let's have any more of it now. Let Madge and your mother go to bed."

CHAPTER VI

I

LONG after she had retired Madge lay staring at the light which struck from the city far beneath up to the ceiling over her head. "Should I have let them keep her out?" How cheap it had been—disgusting! But was it her uncle's fault? Hadn't he tried his best to avoid it? Wasn't Leonora the one who had insisted on making a scene? Her mind went back to Ray's revelations. "And she didn't deny it! It's true!" If anyone had called her a prude, Madge would have been at once indignant; she thought herself very liberal-minded. But this sort of thing, at a time like this—well, it was just plain disgusting!

"If they *had* ever meant to get married, she certainly would have told us so!"

With cold dislike she forced her mind back over the last two days and nights. "No, we've done our level best; we've left nothing undone to keep him alive. And as for this girl, what good could she do him? He's unconscious, isn't he?"

With a restless breath, she got out of bed and went to the window. There for some moments staring down, she grew quieter, and she told herself she was sick and tired of it all. Far below her to the west, the broad river lay white beneath the moon; and she pictured it that evening several hundred miles to the northward, flowing smoothly by the old house where she had lived and played with Gordon —long ago.

But suddenly Ray's words came back: "Wild doings right in this apartment!" And she stiffened at the thought. "Oh, for the goodness sake forget it—leave it alone!" But in spite of herself the memories rose, confused and warm, of certain thoughts and dreams she'd had about Joe Evans and herself. It had all begun so cleanly! On the desk close by her side, she could dimly see the envelope containing those two tickets to the opera for Thursday night. She remembered to have thought how nice it would be to go with him. They both loved music. She recalled those weird little prairie lullabies, and then what he had told her of the music he'd heard with Gordon here. "Yes, but he said nothing," she thought, "of those night rides in Gordon's car—with a crowd of girls from the theatre! I wonder how often he went along? They came back

here for supper, no doubt! Champagne and all the rest of it!" In an instant she got the picture—from a movie she had seen. Oh, how cheap, how cheap it was!

At last she turned away from the window, stiff and aching with fatigue.

"How I hate it all. Oh, I'm done with it! . . . I think now that I can sleep."

2

She awakened later with a start, and saw Miss Field, the night nurse, standing close beside her.

"Sh-h-h!"

"What's the matter? Is he worse?"

"No—I think he's better. I wish you'd come, Miss Cable."

"All right—I'll be there in just a moment!"

When she came into the cool dim room, at first he seemed to her as before—a long white form upon the bed, lifeless, shadowy, unreal. But as she drew near she stopped abruptly. Yes, his face was certainly changed! No longer grey and dead, but alive! There was a faint flush of fever there, and she could see that the muscles were set in a frown of strange absorption. In pain? Yes, he was suffering. Cautiously she came still closer and

at down at one side of the bed. The nurse was on he other. Then in a moment he opened his eyes, tared up at the ceiling—and Madge drew back in er low chair, holding her breath and hoping, hop- ng that he would not notice her. All at once she as an intruder here; for in a twinkling the boy, hose image for two days and nights his family had een building, was gone, and in his place was the tranger who had neglected them—the city man, the illionaire.

Still he did not notice her. Plainly he was ab- orbed in a struggle. "He's trying to think," she told herself. "'Where am I?' he is asking." A faint smile came on his lips and a twinkle into his eyes, as though they saw something incongruous.

"Don't be a damned fool, Joe," he whispered. "I'm too heavy. Let me down. Quit being a hero and give me a Camel."

Madge grew rigid, held her breath. In a flash she remembered what Joe had said about helping Gordon when he was wounded; and she had a pic- ture now of Joe under fire staggering back, with Gordon over his shoulders. A lump rose in her throat, and she felt a rush of mingled pity and relief. Now she knew that all along she had been hoping and praying for this—that Gordon might come back

to life. And yet—it was so different! She had pictured him opening his eyes, clear and conscious, out of danger. All would be over; she would go home. But now she saw him suffering, weak, fevered and delirious! Out of danger yet? Oh, no!

She sat watching his slight restless moves—or rather, his attempts to move—as his mind slowly groped its way through the maze of fevered thoughts back to his grim position here. He turned his head toward the nurse.

"Did you send that message?" he asked. His voice was weak and thick and low.

"Yes, I telephoned," she replied.

"What did she say?"

"She wasn't at home."

He seemed to wince. He shut his eyes.

"What time is it?"

"Never mind now—you must try to sleep."

She put a cold compress over his temples. He relaxed, and soon he was asleep. Miss Field went to the window. Presently Madge joined her there, and in a low voice inquired,

"Who was it that he asked for?"

"Miss O'Brien."

There was a pause.

"And did you telephone her?"

"No."

"Then why did you tell him you did?" asked Madge, with a slight note of impatience.

"I didn't dare to refuse him," was the steady answer. "By telling him that, I got him asleep."

"Yes, but he'll waken, and ask again!"

The nurse looked at her quietly.

"Then that will be for you to decide."

Madge frowned. Miss Field went softly on, as she entered a note upon the chart:

"He asked if she had been here to-night. I said, no. 'Then send her word,' he told me, 'and ask her please to come at once.' "

"I see," said Madge. She wondered whether the nurse had heard them keeping Leonora out. Yes, she must have. The voice of the young actress had risen so loud—every word she spoke must have carried right into this room! With a sickening cold sensation, Madge went slowly back to the bed. The words of the nurse recurred to her: "Then that will be for you to decide." But she could not do it now. Her mind felt numb and heavy. She sat there as though under a spell, with her eyes fixed on her brother's face.

He slept and wakened, engrossed in his pain and

in his impatient efforts to think—now conscious, now delirious.

"Oh, tell 'em to go to the devil, Joe—let 'em sue us if they like! I guess we can stand it!" And on he went into business details which to her were quite unintelligible. But later he asked, sharp and clear,

"Has Mr. Evans been here to-night?"

"No," said the nurse.

"Why the devil not? He lives here with me! Understand? He *must* be here! He wouldn't run off, at a time like this!"

"He had to go out."

"I must see him at once!"

"He'll be back soon. *Please* try to sleep. You must, you know."

Gradually he relaxed again. When he was asleep, Miss Field looked up at Madge and said,

"He has done that several times before. He keeps asking for them both—Mr. Evans—Miss O'Brien. It's hard to know just what to do." As she looked away, Madge felt her thinking, "He didn't ask for any of you."

She kept watching his pulse and his respiration. After a time, she gave an injection; and at the look in her face, Madge asked,

"What was that?"

"A stimulant."

"Why?"

"His heart is getting pretty bad."

"Hadn't I better waken my uncle?"

"No!" came the low, sharp reply. Then, in a more careful tone: "No, Miss Cable, there's no need of that."

Madge looked at her:

"Or Doctor Hoyt?"

She saw Miss Field's expression change.

"No—not yet. But I wish you'd stay here, please. If there is any need, you can go to the 'phone. I don't want to leave him," Miss Field replied. She spoke in a quiet tone of command. How her manner had changed since the night before! As Madge sank back into her chair, the feeling of being a stranger here, and a nobody, kept growing.

Again, in one of his restless spells, she heard Gordon ask the nurse,

"Did you send her word?"

"Yes, Mr. Cable—but it's nearly morning now."

"What if it is? That won't make any difference —not if she really understands! Please go and call her up again, and explain that it is serious!" She

was silent a moment, and he asked, 'Did you hear what I said?"

Then, as though to gain time, she remarked,

"Your sister is here, Mr. Cable."

Madge saw his features sharply contract.

"Who?"

"Your sister."

He shut his eyes. In the silence, Madge sat with her heart in her mouth. "Oh, Gordon, speak to me, please!" she thought. But still he said nothing; and now, by the look on the face of the nurse, she guessed that the woman was telling herself, "So that's how much he cares for her. From the way she has been acting, you might have thought they were close as twins." Once more with a sickening force she felt her false position here—but now she rebelled against it. "After all, I've been doing my best!" she thought. "Heaven knows I didn't plan all this! They sent a telegram and I came! Did I want to? No! What has he ever done for me? To put me in a position like this!" In a flash her mind went over the years of her brother's long neglect of her, and then came back to his obvious indifference to her presence now. "To be told I'm here, and not even speak!" Just for a moment she tried to excuse him. "He doesn't know I'm right by the

bed—he may think I'm asleep in the other room." But it would not do. "Even then, he might have said something—just one word to let her know that he really cared to have me here!" She hated him! She hated herself—for all those castles-in-air she had reared, as the great dream ship of fortune had come sailing smoothly in. "You fool! You little ninny! To have had your head so completely turned!" She was quivering from head to foot; but feeling the tears come hot in her eyes, fiercely she controlled herself and forced her feelings down and down. Back came the old mask of composure which had served so well in the past—in all those years when she had been a nobody back there at home. Watching the form on the bed, she thought, "And now, as his life grows and grows, my own life will go down again. Back to your corner, Madge Cable."

Slowly a change came over her face. With a resolute breath she told herself, "Well, that's all right, I'll be glad to go. But let me tell you that while I'm here I'm not going to be in this false position! Something simply must be done!"

She heard from the bed a sharp weak groan of suffering and weariness. For a moment she forgot herself, in a rush of compassion; but as he subsided

again and relaxed, she came back to her desperate questioning:

"How can I get out of this? It's odious! What can I do? I can't leave him—no, I've got to stay! And he'll ask for her—again and again! And I've got to decide it! What shall I do?"

As the night wore on, more and more she felt the weight of responsibility which she must carry all alone. She would not awaken her Uncle Phil; for without admitting it to herself she knew that she was against him now, and against her cousin and her aunt. They were the ones to blame for this! "I wouldn't have kept Leonora out, I wouldn't have pried into her affairs! I'd have left her alone—left it *all* alone! It's Gordon's business and not ours! I've said so from the very start!" And his money, too—(how she hated it now!)—they had gone after it like wolves! And how blindly and how stupidly they had made it plain to everyone—Joe Evans, the surgeon, the nurses, and even to old Abe himself—that they wanted Gordon to die!

All this was swift, inarticulate, a chaos of feelings, nothing more. But out of it came one clear decision. "I won't call Uncle Phil," she thought, "I'll get Doctor Hoyt instead—give him full responsibility here!"

And so, when about five o'clock the nurse gave another injection, Madge rose quickly and said to her,

"I think I'll call the doctor now."

"What? Which one?"

With a look of impatience, Madge replied,

"Hoyt, of course. He's in charge of this case."

"Well, perhaps that is best," said the other. Madge went to the door, but then turned back.

"No—I think you'd better speak to him yourself. In case he cannot come at once, there are details he'll want to know—and you can tell him. I'll stay here."

And as soon as the nurse was out of the room, Madge spoke to her brother. "I'm not going to sit here," she thought, "and not have him give any sign that he wants me!" And so, leaning forward where he could see her, she said to him in her low clear voice,

"I'm here, Gordon—Madge—your sister." She waited a moment, and then went on: "Mr. Evans sent for me and I came. It has been a hard pull, hasn't it, dear—but you're so much better now."

"Am I?" he asked, huskily. His feverish eyes turned to her face, and he frowned as though trying to make her look real.

"Yes—much better," she went on. "And if you'll only do as I say, and rest, my dear, we'll soon have you strong enough so that you can see your friends."

"Friends—friends?" He was silent a while, apparently trying to clear his thoughts. Then he opened his eyes and looked at her with a quick appealing smile which sent her hostility flying away. "Thanks for coming, Madgy. You're a brick." He reached out his hand. "It's been a long time—hasn't it?"

"Yes——"

"I'm sorry! And I'm glad you're here!"

She gave his hand a little squeeze, and answered softly, "So am I. And I'll be here just as long as you need me." She smiled at him. "But it won't be long. You'll be well soon and I can go home." In spite of herself, she added that; but he did not seem to notice it. For a time there was silence. Then he asked,

"Isn't Joe Evans staying here?"

"No—there wasn't room, you see. But he comes often," she replied. Again she saw his face contract.

"I've got to see him pretty soon. There are some things he ought to know." With a humorous twitch of his lips, he added, "Poor devil, he must be

sweating blood. Tight place in our business. See?"

"Then rest," she said, "so that you can talk to him when he comes."

"Doctors think I will pull through?"

Again she pressed his hand and said,

"Of course they do! We all do!"

"All do? Who do you mean?" he asked, opening again his eyes.

"Now he's thinking of Leonora," thought Madge. Aloud she said, "Oh, Mr. Evans, the nurses and I." She did not speak of his relatives; for if he knew that they were here, it would give him a scare, she thought. Presently she heard him ask,

"Hasn't anyone else been here?"

"Yes—a Miss O'Brien," she said.

He waited a bit, and then inquired,

"Often?"

"Yes——"

Again a pause.

"When did she happen to be here last?" His attempt at indifference was pathetic.

"Not long ago—but you were unconscious."

"Oh—I see." Once more there was silence. "And Joe?" he asked.

"He'll be here soon. I told you that—and you've

talked enough. Now you must try to sleep," she said.

"All right, Madgy—I'll do my best."

He smiled. His hand was still in hers, and soon again he was sleeping.

Long before this, she had heard the nurse come back and stop, listening, at the door. And she was glad that the woman had heard Gordon speak to her like a sister. She felt better about her position here. It was not quite so odious.

3

"The doctor doesn't seem to think the danger is immediate," said Miss Field, as she came in. "He will be here about seven. Hadn't you better get some rest? It may be a hard day for you."

"Thanks—I will," Madge answered.

She went to her room and got back into bed; she felt so very weary that nothing on earth could trouble her. "He's conscious now. That changes things. After all, it's his affair, not mine. If he wants that girl, he shall have her," she thought. And very soon she was sound asleep.

But when roused at seven by the nurse, awake in an instant and clear eyed, she asked,

"Is the doctor here?"

"Yes, Miss Cable."

"I'll be right in."

When she entered Gordon's room, the surgeon was examining him. Intently watching Gordon's face, he was gently moving and feeling his limbs, looking for signs of paralysis. But there were none. He turned with a smile. He and Madge had got on well from the start.

"Your brother is coming on finely now," he said, when they were in the hall. "I'm glad we didn't operate."

The relief was plain in Madge's eyes.

"You mean he's out of danger?"

"No, I can't say that," he replied. "He has had a severe concussion—he's very weak and in terrible pain—and that will make him weaker still."

"Oh, can't you spare him that?" she asked.

"We'll do what we can, Miss Cable—but with his heart action as it is, depressants might be dangerous. His heart is none too strong at best. He must have been living pretty hard. However, I think we'll get him through. If he lives another twenty-four hours, I guess we can call him out of the woods. What he needs above everything else is rest and quiet," the surgeon said.

When he had left, she turned back from the door and met her uncle, in shirt and trousers.

"Who was that?" he asked her.

"Doctor Hoyt."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"I hadn't time. He was only here a few minutes," she said. "Gordon is better, Uncle Phil."

"What?" he asked, in a startled tone.

She told him all she could remember of the details she had learned from the surgeon.

"I'll see him myself," her uncle said.

"Yes, I wish you would," she replied.

He went into the sick room; and when he came out, his expression was queer.

"He's not out of danger yet," he remarked, "but there's no doubt about the fact that his chances are immensely improved. Thank God, I was here to keep that surgeon from breaking into his head with a chisel."

"Yes," said Madge. Watching her uncle's face, she was thinking, "No, he's not *sorry* that Gordon is better—but it changes things, that's all. He's got to adjust all his thinking. That hospital is tumbling down." Forgetting her own fine visions, she felt compassion for him now. "And poor Aunt Abby—that lovely old house, and the chance to marry off

the girls. And Ray, and his auto factory. Well, they'll have to get used to it."

Rather grimly she watched them take the news; and breakfasting with them she recalled the dinner last night, the dinner of dreams. It was different now. On Ray, glum and silent, she spent not a thought; but she pitied his mother. Aunt Abby looked so troubled and anxious, plainly not knowing where she stood. She could barely touch her breakfast.

"Oh, I hope he does get through! I've been praying for him so hard!" she said.

And Madge thought, "Yes, and she means it, too. And she *has* prayed—all the harder because she felt guilty over those dreams. And now what a difference—just think! Everything suddenly melting away!" Her aunt all at once looked old and haggard. "It's cruel—it's hard—it's terrible!"

But soon her thoughts took another turn, for she began to notice a change in their attitude toward herself. Already they were beginning to put her back in her old position, as a person who didn't count. She smiled at that. "I wish I *were* back," she told herself. "But I'm not. I'm still the one to decide." She remembered Leonora; and as she began to

speak of her, at once she could feel all three of them rise in opposition again; and their manner to Madge was altered now. The deference of the night before was gone; they tried to snub her. When she said, "It's hard to know what is best," her uncle replied, in the tone he had used with her when she was a nobody,

"Now, look here—hadn't you better leave this to me? I was right about that operation. Suppose you trust me once again? Gordon is half delirious —he's not himself—he don't know what he wants. There is no need whatever to let that young actress into the room."

"Yes, but suppose he asks for her?"

"I thought we had decided all this!" her aunt cut in.

Madge looked at Mrs. Dwight and said,

"When I did decide, Aunt Abby, Gordon was still unconscious. I had no way of knowing his wishes."

"You have none now!" said her cousin Ray. "The man's half dippy with pain in his head! How can he know what he really wants?"

"That has nothing to do with it, Ray," Madge retorted promptly. "The doctor says he must have rest. And if he keeps asking for her—worried be-

cause she doesn't come—up will go his temperature and he'll get worse. He may even die!"

She shot that out in a challenging tone. Ray's mother instantly caught it and said,

"We don't want that! Do we, Madge?"

"No, Auntie," Madge answered, dropping her voice and feeling wretched all at once. And seeing the change, her Uncle Phil was prompt to take advantage. He said,

"And to keep him alive, I ask again if you won't trust my judgment, Madge?"

She threw a tortured look at him.

"What *is* your judgment, Uncle Phil?"

"That if Gordon is suffering so much, and worrying—we quiet him. It's simple enough."

"Drug him, you mean. But when I asked Doctor Hoyt about that he said it might be dangerous. We might even kill him if we did that!"

"That's true—we might," was his steady reply. "He is still in a very critical state—just balancing between life and death." Madge heard her aunt draw a sharp little breath. "But the risk we take by a drug," he went on, "is not half so great as that we'll run if we let this young actress into the room, and she acts as we have seen her act every time she has been here."

"But she wouldn't!" Madge exclaimed.

"I disagree with you," he rejoined.

"So do I!" said Ray.

"And I!" said his mother.

Madge threw a hard glance at them all. How their whole tone to her had changed!

Her uncle went on:

"There's no surprise in this to me. I told you he'd probably ask for her, if he came to his senses. Sick men often ask for things which are bad for them—whiskey—cigarettes. He's asking for his mistress now. We might as well call her what she is—face facts as they are——"

"All right, let's do it!" Madge rejoined. "What facts have you got to make you sure she won't be perfectly quiet in there? What possible reason could she have for raising a rumpus as you suggest?"

"His money!" Ray replied.

Madge turned an angry look on him.

"Oh, I've heard enough of that! We know he did ask her to marry him once, and that she refused! Does that look as though she were after his money?"

"What reason did Mr. Evans give for her refusal?" asked Uncle Phil. "The glamor and tinsel of her career. She didn't care for Gordon enough to give up the theatre!" A sniff from Aunt Abby.

"But she wouldn't have to now," he continued, smoothly. "Once we let her into that room, she might very easily work him up to make the statement which she needs. The excitement of it would kill him, no doubt, but it wouldn't kill his bank account. And so the young lady, on his death, could have her career and the money, too."

"I don't believe it! It's too absurd!" Madge said, in a quivering voice. "How crazy we all are," she thought, "to be talking and thinking and feeling like this! What do we know of such affairs?" Aloud she asked, "You mean to say she'd go into his room with a cold-blooded scheme like that?"

"Not at all," he answered promptly. "There's nothing cold-blooded about this young woman—she's warm, she's a bundle of nerves and emotions! She wouldn't admit any plan to herself, she would just let her feelings rise—what she calls her love for him. And so she'd make a scene of it—just as we've seen her do in this room, every time we let her in. And Nature would soon do the rest—for Gordon's life hangs by a thread." He paused for a moment and then said, with a recurrence in his voice of the old authoritative note, "Now, Madge, you had better leave this to me. If Gordon asks for this woman again, or shows any signs of worry or pain, the only

kind and sensible course is to give him something to quiet him."

"I can't, Uncle Phil! Not without Doctor Hoyt!"

He gave her an injured look and said,

"Very well—if you feel that way."

Aunt Abby put in stiffly,

"I'm sorry, Madge, that you don't feel you can leave this in your uncle's hands!"

"Never mind that part of it," he said. "Madge is trying to do her best. And so long as this fellow Hoyt is in charge, I don't want to interfere—unless it is absolutely essential. So long as we keep this woman out, and Gordon doesn't worry too much, I think he's safe. I'll keep a close watch on him, of course——"

"Uncle Phil," Madge interrupted, "did Gordon recognize you when you were in the room just now?"

"No, my dear, he was asleep."

"Then I think it might be a great mistake to let him know you're here," she said, "or Aunt Abby or Ray! You'd better all keep out of the room!"

"Well!" exclaimed Aunt Abby.

"Why?" inquired Uncle Phil.

"Don't you see? If he knows that the whole family have come way down from Halesburg, of

course he'll think he's going to die! He mustn't learn it!" she declared.

"Well, there may be something in that," Doctor Cable answered. "And whenever I am in the room I'll take care that he doesn't notice me. I've changed a great deal in the last few years, and in his present feverish state I hardly think he'd give me a thought. But I'll keep out of sight, to make doubly sure."

4

Miss Cochran, the pretty young day nurse, appeared then in the doorway, with an inquisitive look in her face.

"What is it?" Madge asked, with a gleam of annoyance.

"Your brother wants to see you, Miss Cable."

"Very well, I'll come at once."

When she came again into Gordon's room, she saw his gaze eagerly fixed on the door. He looked feverish, and in his voice she caught a note of repressed excitement.

"Hello, Madgy. I feel a lot better now," he said, as she came to the bedside.

"That's good."

As she took his hand, her brother gave her a queer little look, awkward, friendly, questioning, as though

he were asking, "And how do *you* feel? What have you been doing, all these years? What a damn shame I've neglected you so! Let's try to get together, Sis." But it passed; and instead, he asked her,

"Did you send that message?"

She waited a moment.

"To whom?" she inquired. He hesitated.

"To Evans," he said. "I can't see why he doesn't come."

"Why Gordon, he knows you're doing well," she reassured him, quietly. "And he's horribly busy at the office. He told me so."

"That's just it! The poor devil must be half crazy down there! We've got some law-suits on our hands, and there are some things he's got to know!" With an effort to steady his voice, and a humorous little smile, he said, "I went out of that automobile so fast I didn't have time to tell him, you see. And if I shouldn't happen to pull through——"

"You're going to, Gordon!"

He shut his eyes.

"It's worse than you know," he muttered. She took his hand, he held it tight—then let it go, and lay there.

"Anyone else been here?" he asked.

"No——"

Again there was a silence.

"And have you telephoned to Joe?"

"Not yet——"

"Then do it—please—at once! If he knew that I was conscious, he'd be here on the double quick!"

"All right, I'll get him here," she said. "Now try to rest before he comes."

He smiled at her, while he winced with pain.

"That isn't easy," he replied.

5

As Madge went out to the telephone, she heard a key in the entrance door. "That's Joe now," she told herself. She went and met him coming in.

"Gordon is better," she said, at once. "He has come to, and he wants to see you."

At the look of immense relief which instantly swept over his face, she forgot her cold hostility toward him on the night before. In the living room, where he stopped to speak with her relatives, she felt the contrast between his relief and the air of troubled tension on the faces of the other three. And she thought, "Thank God, here's somebody who is just honestly happy about it!" She followed him into Gordon's room; and as he stood by the

bed, tall and clumsy, looking down, she heard him say in his soft Southern voice,

"Hello, Buddy, how goes it? Better now?"

"Hello, Joe." Out came Gordon's hand. At the look and the smile that went with it, she felt a constriction of her throat. "Are we alone?" she heard Gordon ask, and she drew back out of the room.

Five minutes later, she looked in again. Both of them were smiling still, engrossed in each other; and in a low voice her brother was talking rapidly. She caught the words: "You tell the old pirate that if his bank won't carry us over into next week——" And with relief she told herself, "So it isn't *only* Leonora!" Aloud she said,

"I'm afraid you've talked all you ought to, now——"

"Oh, no, we haven't, we've just begun!" her brother replied. But his partner said,

"I reckon you're right, Miss Cable."

And a little later he came with her into the hall, shutting the door behind him. There at once his manner changed.

"Look here," he said, in an anxious tone, "I reckon he's right worried because Miss O'Brien hasn't been here. He has sent for her twice, he tells me." And

when Madge did not reply at once, he asked, "Are you sure you-all are doing the right thing to shut her out?"

The thought leaped into Madge's mind: "He knows about last night—of course! She must have gone and told him!" Madge could see her doing it—routing him out of bed, of course, though it was after midnight! Intimate pals! Back with a rush came the picture of wild parties in these rooms. And her voice had a caustic note, as she said,

"I'm certainly *trying* to do the right thing——"

"I know you are——" still anxiously. "But you don't know Gordon as I do—or Leonora either."

"No, I don't suppose I do! But I've learned a few things since you were here which make quite a difference!" She waited just an instant. "She told you about that, I presume—last night, I mean——"

"Yes——"

"You didn't tell me she was that kind!"

"No—I didn't tell you." He paused. "But when you speak of her as 'that kind,' you show you jest don't understand."

"Don't I?" she retorted. And to herself she added, "Now he's wondering how he can bring me around. He's looking at me as a little old maid from

a small town, with narrow, stiff, old-fashioned views about such things!" Aloud she said,

"I guess she didn't tell you how she acted here last night!"

"Oh, I don't need to be told all that—I know Leonora pretty well!"

As he spoke, she caught an unmistakable gleam of dislike in Joe's brown eyes; and instantly there came a change in the whole expression of Madge's face. She liked him so much better now!

"But I don't jest see," he continued, "what difference it makes to us what kind of a woman she may be—or what she does or how she acts. All we've got to think of is how we can pull Gordon through! This may be a matter of saving his life!"

She looked up. Her face was quivering.

"Yes, and I *want* to save his life! I'm doing the best that I know how!"

"I know you are—I know you are!"

"He's got to be let alone—to rest!"

"But he won't—he'll worry till she comes!"

"I know all that," retorted Madge, "but if I let her in, how can I tell she won't launch into one of those scenes of hers and stir him all up?"

"She won't do that!"

"How do you know? And even if she doesn't,"

said Madge, "the mere feeling of her hand in his may have the same effect on him! There must be certain memories that——"

She broke off sharply, reddening; for she thought she caught in his eyes a flash of amused impatience, and that he was putting her down again as a little old maid from the country. In a voice of cold dislike, she said,

"I think you'll have to leave this to me. I'm not going to let her in—not yet—not if I can help myself. But I'll watch my brother closely; and if there is any change for the worse, I'll let you know."

6

When Joe had gone, and Madge came into the living room, her Uncle Phil said approvingly,

"We couldn't well help hearing what young Evans said to you, Madge. I'm very glad you kept your head."

She frowned at that.

"But he may be right. We may have to let her come," she replied.

"Not if you *keep* your head, my dear, and keep seeing clearly what's happening here."

"What *is* happening, Uncle Phil?"

Disregarding her impatience, he said,

"To begin with, this young lady is getting poor Evans right under her thumb."

"She isn't! He dislikes her!"

"Does he? Still, he's playing her game. But you ask me what is happening. The answer is quite plain, I think. Gordon needs above everything else rest and quiet. Is he getting that? First, the nurse lets him talk and excite himself, and she runs out for him to the 'phone. Then you come in, and the surgeon comes, and then Evans—all talking, all stirring him up—when what the boy needs is rest and sleep. And one good shot in his left arm——"

"I tell you Doctor Hoyt is against it!"

"And I tell *you,* Madge," Aunt Abby cut in, "that I think you are making a grave mistake in not trusting to your Uncle Phil and letting this New York surgeon go! What does he care for Gordon? What do the nurses care—either one? All intruders—all outsiders! Yet you let them all into the room—and then you let his partner in, to worry him with business—while you are keeping his own flesh and blood, who really do care for the poor boy, sitting out here like so many strangers!"

"I'm sorry, Aunt Abby! I *gave* you my reasons!"

Her aunt paid no attention to that. Her voice was loud, unnatural:

"And under the pressure they're bringing to bear, you are even considering letting poor Gordon, if he dies, go straight up to his Maker out of a fancy woman's arms! What we ought to have here is a minister—as I've said more than once before!"

"Yes," said Madge, "I know you have! Have you found one yet, if we need him, Aunt Abby?"

"I have—I can get him on the 'phone!"

Madge shivered. She was just on the point of crying out, "And the undertaker, too! Have you got *him* ready on the 'phone?" But she checked herself with an effort. "No," she thought, "we're not murdering Gordon. Every single one of us is doing what he thinks is right. Oh, it's funny—funny!" And looking at her aunt, she thought, "What a strain it is. How feeble she is. She'll have a sick turn after this."

"Aunt Abby," she said, quietly, "we're all of us doing the best we can. I'm *not* going to let that woman in—not yet, at least—and I'm not disregarding your judgment here."

"But you *are* keeping me out of his room!"

"I won't do that. Come in if you like," Madge said, in a voice of weariness.

Again she could feel them getting their way, over-

ruling her and forcing her back into her old place in the family.

7

A few minutes later, with her aunt and uncle, she stood by her brother's bed.

"Gordon," she said, as he opened his eyes, "here are Aunt Abby and Uncle Phil. They both just happened to be in town——"

"And we heard of your accident, my boy," continued smoothly Uncle Phil. "So we came right around to see what we could do."

"That's good of you," he answered, in a low voice, tense and strained. "Glad to see you, Uncle Phil—Aunt Abby, too."

He smiled at them; but a queer expression had come in his eyes—half frightened. Aunt Abby noticed it; and at once, in a motherly way, she leaned over and took his hand.

"I've been praying for you, Gordon dear. Thank God, you're so much better now!"

"Am I? I don't feel so!"

"Oh yes, you are!" And she patted his hand. "I've been thinking, Gordon, of the time I nursed you as a little boy—and wishing I could do it now. All last night, while I lay awake out there in the other room——"

"Oh. You were both here all night?" he cut in softly. She gave a slight start.

"Yes, you were pretty sick, you know. But I guess you don't need us any more. All you need is to rest, my dear, keep perfectly quiet and get your strength. So we mustn't stay here talking."

"Thank you, Aunt Abby, I'm glad you came. But it's funny that you and Uncle Phil both happened to be in the city just now."

"Yes, wasn't it lucky?" she replied.

As they went out, Madge glanced back and saw that frightened look in his eyes.

"He wasn't fooled for a minute!" she thought. "He knows they sent for the family!"

CHAPTER VII

LUNCHEON was ready. As they sat down—Madge, Uncle Phil, Aunt Abby and Ray—they were silent. Then Aunt Abby asked,

"Isn't that young nurse coming to lunch?"

"No, she's afraid to leave him now. I'll take something in to her," Madge replied. And the silence settled as before, broken only by brief remarks. Madge barely ate. She was torn between the appeal of her brother and his friend and the grim vigilant opposition of the three people sitting here.

"Suppose I do let her come," she thought, "and she does excite him too much, and he dies—and somehow, by some tricks in the law, she gets his money and robs us all? The family would call me then a little sentimental dupe, a murderess! And they would be right!" She compressed her lips. How she had grown to hate this place! Oh, to get away from it—home!

All at once she noticed on the face of old black Abe, who was serving her aunt, such a ludicrous look of anxiety, that she almost laughed aloud. She read his thoughts, for in the kitchen she had found

signs in plenty that Abe had been grafting busily for months and months on food supplies. And his anxious look was not only for Gordon but for his own easy berth and the pickings here.

Suddenly, as she scanned his face, she heard herself describing it to Amanda Berry back at home, in their small flat with the varnished stairs, and then going on and on and on, giving Amanda every detail of this whole queer week, from start to finish. Oh, what a talk it was going to be! The thought of it broke her tension. Somehow or other she felt sure that the whole affair would soon be like a dream left far behind her. "The sooner, the better," she told herself. "It has never seemed real—not once it hasn't!" She looked at her aunt, and pitied her. "It has taken you, too, and twisted you all out of your natural self," she thought. In a friendly tone she remarked,

"It has seemed a long time, hasn't it, dear?"

"Yes, very long," was the low reply.

Then Ray spoke up, in an attempt to make things nice and natural.

"Let's see, Mother—when did you come?" He began to reckon up the days. "Look here," he cried, with a quick smile. "I'll bet you've all forgotten one thing. To-morrow is Thanksgiving Day."

"Thanksgiving Day!" For an instant, his mother and all the rest of them seemed to stiffen in their chairs. Then in a shaking voice she cried, "Let us hope he'll be alive!"

The next moment she rose and went to her room; and Ray gave a look at the others that said,

"Well, this bunch is getting to be a little too queer and touchy for me!"

2

When Madge took some luncheon in to the nurse, Miss Cochran made a sign to her that her brother was awake. He lay staring up at the ceiling, engrossed. When he caught sight of her, he smiled.

"Come here, Madge, pretty close," he said, "so that I can talk to you."

With alarm she noticed that his voice, though excited, did not sound so strong. As she sat down and took his hand, she felt it hot. It held hers tight.

"Poor Gordy," she said softly. "You'll be so much better very soon."

He frowned at that.

"Mighty decent of you to come way down here—after the kind of brother I've been. But I guess we'd better face things as they are. Joe would never have

sent for you, and you wouldn't have got the whole family here, unless you knew——"

She interrupted:

"Yes, you've had a very close shave. But you're almost out of danger now——"

He shot a glance that went into her like a sudden flash of light. Then he stared at the ceiling as before.

"It doesn't feel so," he replied. In a moment he continued, "Not that I'm afraid of it. It's just—damned tough—that's all it is! There was such a lot I meant to do! Plans? Good God! . . . . Well——"

He smiled. She squeezed his hand slowly tighter and said,

"Gordon, you're not going to die! All in the world you need is rest!"

But he gave a little laugh at that.

"That's what you all keep telling me! But it isn't quite square to a fellow, is it—to let him slip over into the dark without giving him a chance to finish up his business here? I'd rather look it in the face! I can stand the pain—but what I can't stand—so easily—is being forgotten!"

Madge caught her breath.

"Why Gordy," she asked him, "where in the world

did you get any such idea as that? Ever since I came here I've been answering the 'phone. Your friends keep calling——"

He broke in.

"Did you get their names?"

"Yes——"

"Let's hear a few—if you can remember."

"Oh yes." She began to give him some. When she came to "Miss O'Brien," he asked,

"When was that?"

"Yesterday."

He was silent, but she guessed he was thinking, "I've sent word to her twice since then! And she knows I'm dying!" After a little, she heard him say,

"Well, all right, so much for that. It's a gay old town, this city is. Die, and you can die alone."

Madge leaned over him suddenly.

"Gordon, is there anyone that you want me to send for now? If you do, I'll get her!"

"No! Leave her alone!" He lay looking up with hard bitter eyes. "I'm sick of her—sick of everything!"

"You won't be, Gordon! Just as soon as we can get you well again——"

He smiled at that and pressed her hand.

"I'm glad you're here, Sis. Stay here, please. I'm afraid to go home alone in the dark."

As she sat rigid by his side, the tears came quickly in her eyes. "I've got to get her," she told herself. "And when she comes she'll tell him, of course—tell him how we kept her out! I don't care—it can't be helped! This is what comes of meddling!"

She heard her brother's voice again:

"We've got pretty far apart, you and I, since the nights when we used to sneak down to the river. . . . Remember the time—that moonshiny night—when we 'ran away from home forever?' "

"Yes," she whispered. He went on:

"When we got into the boat, I asked, *'Now* what'll we do?' And then you said, folding your fat little hands, 'Live happy ever after, of course.' " He chuckled. "But what I never told you was that the rotten old painter almost broke. . . . Golly, how I wanted to—to cut the rope and float away."

His hand relaxed; he shut his eyes.

"This won't do!" she told herself; and quickly, in an eager voice, she spoke of other memories—things they had done in those early days; and of his rapid rise since then.

"I've been mighty proud of you, dear," she said,

"and I expect to be prouder still before you get through!"

"Oh, it hasn't been much to be proud of——"

But she went on in the same tone: "You're lucky to have such a partner, too, as Mr. Evans—such a friend. He worships you, Gordon!" Her brother smiled.

"We've been through some tight places together," he said.

"In France, you mean——"

"Yes—and here."

She could see his thoughts come back to his business.

"You ought to get away from it, Gordon—just drop business for a while and get away with Joe to Texas—live on horseback—sleep out of doors."

"I'm afraid we couldn't drop it like that. Money is pretty tight, just now."

As he went on speaking of his affairs, his talk grew unintelligible. Banks, business firms, the names of ships and of government officials here and in England—all came in. His feverish mind grew incoherent, on the border land of dreams. Again and again she tried to leave him, so that he could go to sleep; but he kept her there each time by a sharp tightening of his hand, and went on with this mut-

tered picture of his life in these last years—a life lean, strenuous, grasping, hard; then suddenly eager, boyish, kind. She would hear him chuckle to himself over Joe and various things they had done—down at the office or up in these rooms or in the army over in France. His thoughts for a moment would leap over there, but back they would come to his life in New York—to his business worries—to Leonora. And each time he thought of her, his mind would seem to grow clear again. All the muttering would stop, and in the silence Madge could feel his feverish will hold the girl's image up before him, asking, "Why is it? What have I done?" With a bitter little laugh or a word, back he would go to his mutterings.

"Well," she thought, "this settles it. If he isn't better by night, she must come! Oh, what a rumpus there will be!"

3

The autumn dusk crept into the room. On the other side of the bed, the nurse would come from time to time. Pulse, respiration, temperature. About five, she made a sign to Madge and went to the door; and when Madge followed her, she said,

"Better send for Doctor Hoyt."

As Madge went to the telephone, she caught an inquiring look from her cousin.

"Any change in him?" asked Ray.

"Yes, he's worse. The nurse wants Doctor Hoyt at once."

"Hadn't Phil better go to him, while you're getting the doctor?" Aunt Abby asked.

"Yes—will you, Uncle?"

"Yes, my dear."

Their voices had all suddenly become so friendly and so kind!

At the telephone she found that Hoyt was not in his office. With a pang of dismay she said,

"Then find him! You must find him! We ought to have him here right off!"

On her way back to Gordon's room, her aunt stopped her.

"Well? Is he coming?"

"They can't get him yet!"

"Oh. But—now don't worry, child. It's lucky your Uncle Phil is here. I strongly advise you to trust him, Madge."

At the door of her brother's room, Madge made a sign to Doctor Cable, and he came out to the hall.

"What do you think?" she asked him.

His reply was sharp and stern:

"I think Gordon must be made to rest! This endless talking and tossing about is criminal! It can't go on! His mind is working like an engine—burning up what little strength he has left! We must put a stop to it!"

"Drug him?"

"Yes!"

Madge faced him a moment, with her hands slowly locking, unlocking. Then she asked,

"If we don't, and he goes on like this, how long will it be? Not—not any minute?"

"Oh, no—he's not as bad as that."

She drew a breath of relief and said,

"Then I'll wait for Doctor Hoyt."

"Very well, Madge," her uncle replied; but the look which he gave her added, "You're taking Gordon's life in your hands."

Mrs. Dwight, who had joined them and listened intently, now spoke up.

"Madge," she said, in a solemn tone, "if you won't do as your uncle advises, at least let me send for Doctor McAndrews."

"Who?"

"That minister." Madge gave a start. "We might as well face the truth, my dear. Gordon is

right on the very brink, and I doubt if he's been to church in years."

"Not yet, Aunt Abby—oh, not yet!"

And Madge went back to his bedside.

4

"Did you get him?" asked the nurse.

"No, but his office will do their best to find where he is and send him here."

As Madge sat down, her eye was caught by a small clock which belonged to the nurse and stood on the table. And sitting there she kept looking at it impatiently. Again she went to the telephone and called the doctor's office. A voice replied,

"He's in an operation. He'll come to you as soon as he's through—and in the meantime he has left some orders I'm to give the nurse. Please ask her to come to the 'phone."

"All right, I'll get her."

And she did. As the time dragged on, she made up her mind to send for Leonora at once. Not knowing where to reach her, she called up Evans at his office. He was gone. She tried his hotel. He was not there. "All right," she thought, "he'll be here soon." But before he arrived, the doctor came.

With relief she heard his gruff voice in the hall. "Now he will decide it!" she told herself. When he came in, he lost no time. He stood watching Gordon keenly a while, then took the chart to the table and read it. He spoke an order to the nurse, and she gave him a needle, which he filled and jabbed into Gordon's arm. Presently Madge saw her brother's eyes open and turn to the surgeon's face, and she knew at once that his mind was clear.

"Are you the doctor here?" he asked.

"Yes, my lad."

"Then I want to know how close I am to going out. If I am, there's something I've got to do—decide, I mean—*somebody I must see—to settle something—it's bothering me,*" he said, with a fixed unnatural smile.

Hoyt's reply was blunt and clear:

"I'm betting on your pulling through. If you'll obey orders and try to rest——"

"I can't till I see her!"

"In that case, I think you'd better see her, my boy."

A few minutes later, with Madge in the hall, he asked her,

"Do you know who it is your brother wants?"

"Yes——"

"Then I'd try to get her here, just as quickly as you can."

Madge trembled. She was thinking fast. She would not wait any longer for Joe. Leonora must be at her theatre now, for it was after seven o'clock and she must need a lot of time to dress and make up for her part.

"Is he as bad as that?" she asked.

"He's not very well! He may die either way—but her coming here might double his chances," Hoyt replied. "We can't let him go on exciting himself. If we do——"

"How soon would the crisis come?"

"It's here right now, Miss Cable," was his impatient answer. But noticing the strain in her eyes, he added in a kinder tone, "I don't mean he's going to die in an hour—I'm thinking of the end of the night. Your brother must get strength for that. His mind must rest!"

"Good evening, Doctor," said Uncle Phil, who had come out into the hall.

"Good evening, sir."

In voices which did not try to hide their keen dislike for one another, the two men talked for a little while, in questions and brief curt replies.

"I've been advising Miss Cable," Hoyt ended, as

he picked up his coat from a chair, "to get a certain young woman at once, whom your nephew has been asking for. A pity she wasn't here before—for until she comes I doubt if he'll rest."

"Do you know who she is—or what she is?" asked Uncle Phil. The other replied,

"That's none of my business, is it?"

"Hasn't she seen you to-day?"

"Who?"

"This girl. Her name is O'Brien."

The surgeon reddened a bit with annoyance.

"O'Brien? Yes. She called me up."

"I thought so. And what did she say?"

"There's no need of going into all that. She feels that you're keeping her out of his room. Very well—you may have good reasons—that is none of my affair. But Miss Cable has asked for my advice. It is this. If you want to keep this man alive, give him anyone he wants."

"You can see no other way out of this, Doctor?"

"No, sir."

"You refuse to give him a sedative?"

"I do——"

"There I disagree with you."

Abruptly the surgeon turned to Madge.

"Then suppose I drop the case," he said.

"No, no! I don't want you to do that!" She put her hand quickly on his arm, and in a desperate voice she repeated, "Don't do that!"

"Very well," he replied. "Then I'll be within call. You can reach me any time to-night. But I hope you will get that young woman here!"

5

"Madge," said her uncle, when Hoyt had gone and she started for the telephone, "before you overrule my opinion I want you to see this just as it is. I don't want you to take a step that you'll be sorry for all your life."

"Uncle Phil, please give it up!" she replied, in a hard and tortured voice. "I'm half crazy! But I know the only thing that I can do is to take the very best advice this city has to offer us—and follow it! That's all I can do!"

"Yes, if you're sure it's the best advice, and given all on Gordon's account."

She shot a look at him.

"What do you mean?"

"Did this man Hoyt ever let you know—before I forced it out of him—that he was in touch with this young actress?"

"No——"

"Why didn't he? Why did he act as though he had never heard of her?"

"Uncle Phil, are you trying to say that he is on her payroll, too?" cried Madge. And to herself she cried again, "Oh, we're all crazy—crazy!"

"No," was his answer, "but I do mean that she is just the kind of girl—with looks and brains and vivid charms—who can get most men to do as she likes. Now suppose she has this surgeon, too—suppose that without knowing it he has been influenced by this girl? She may have been seeing him right along. I say, supposing this were true? Don't his actions all fit in? Hasn't he been doing just what she would want him to, from the start? First he wanted to operate. Why? To save Gordon's life? Quite possibly. I'm not accusing him of a crime. It's a very close decision we made, and a surgeon could easily lean a bit to one side or the other. But the point I'm making is that he leaned the way she wanted him to!"

"How do you know she wanted it?"

"Don't you remember—Monday night—how strong she was for an operation?"

"Why, then, why?"

"Because that gave her the best chance of bringing him back to consciousness! And now she wants

the same thing again—and this fellow Hoyt agrees again! Don't drug him—keep him conscious—no matter how much he suffers! Why? So that she can see him—show him her love for him, she would say—and by showing that love and arousing his, before the nurse as witness, get the declaration she needs for a big scene in the probate court!"

He stopped, and at once Aunt Abby asked Madge,

"Well? Isn't it all as clear as day?"

"No—not as day," Madge answered. "I don't feel at all like that! I feel as though I were sitting at the movies—in the dark!"

Ray gave a cough of warning then, and Madge saw old Abe at the door, his dark face wrinkled tight with his effort to learn how things were going now.

"Is supper ready, Abe?" she asked.

"Yes'm—yes'm, Miss Cable!" he said, with a quick appealing smile. "So it's got him, too!" she told herself. "He looks as though he had one foot in the grave, and the other in red hot coals!"

6

The door bell rang, and she turned with a start. Ray leaned back in his chair and said,

"Well, there's our little actress friend. I *thought* it was about time for a scene."

But as they looked toward the hall, Madge commanded sternly,

"Will you please leave this to me—and go in to supper—all of you?"

For a moment, as she faced them, once more she felt her power come back.

"Very well, Madge—just as you say," agreed Aunt Abby, gently.

As she went to the door, Madge thought, "Thank Heaven, she *did* come!" But she was wrong. When she opened the door, she found Joe there.

"Sorry I had to ring," he began. "I left my keys at the office." Then he saw her expression, and asked, "What has happened, Miss Cable? He isn't dead!"

"No—he isn't dead," she said. "Come in here and I'll tell you."

They went into the living room, and in a low voice she gave him the facts.

"Now," she ended, "I don't propose to have any more delay about this. If she's coming, she must come to-night!"

"Good! That's fine!"

"But I want to talk to her first!"

"Why?" he asked. "There isn't much time——"

"Yes, there is—we've got hours yet! Hours!" she repeated as though to reassure herself.

"But——"

"Are you deciding this or am I?"

Again catching the look in her eyes, he said to her, in a steadying tone,

"Forgive me, Miss Cable—please go on."

But she was not to be quieted.

"There's very little more to say! I'm sick of this place—I want to be through! To do what's right and then get away!"

She stopped, with a slight sob in her throat.

"I understand," he answered, still in that low steady voice. "And now you want to see her, you say."

"Yes, I do! I've got to see that girl as she is! I've got to be sure she won't stir him all up! From all I've seen of her and heard, she's just the cheap emotional kind to do it—have a love scene—a good big one—and excite him so, that he'll be worse than he is now!"

One moment more Joe watched her.

"Well," he answered softly, "I reckon that will be all right. If you want to see her as she is, why not see her at her job? Better come right now to the theatre."

"All right!"

She went at once into the hall and opened the door onto the landing. He followed her.

"Don't you want a wrap?"

"No!" she exclaimed. "I haven't time! Come quick, or they'll all make a fuss! They heard us talking, you may be sure! And I *can't stand* more arguing!"

She drew him out and shut the door, and then in a panic she started downstairs. No time to wait for the elevator! Down and down, flight after flight. Would they never end? She gave a breathless laugh. "There it is! Stop it!" From above, the elevator came smoothly down. Joe called, and it stopped and they got in. And a few moments later, down on the street, he hailed a taxi and helped her inside.

He was talking now, but she did not hear. Already she was a little scared by what she had done—and hysterical. Her thoughts and feelings played queer tricks. Suddenly the certainty came that her Uncle Phil was right about this! He had been right from the very start! Right about the operation and in this drugging plan of his! "It's sensible! And I'm throwing it over! I'll be to blame if Gordon dies!" She clenched her hands—but the next

instant all this certainty was gone. "I tell you it's all nonsense! I'm following the best advice and judgment I can get in New York for love or money!" She stopped with a jerk. Love or Money? Why was that phrase so queerly familiar? Oh, yes—she remembered now. The title of a moving picture she and Amanda Berry had seen, only a few weeks ago. With a grim, excited smile, back she came to the question here. "I haven't decided yet," she thought. "I'll see her—and then make up my mind!"

Then she felt Joe's hand on hers, and instantly a feeling came which made her angry, tense and cold. As she snatched her hand away, he said, speaking slowly and quietly,

"I jest knew that I could count on you. I reckon you've had a right hard time—but you're doing jest the right thing now—and we'll never forget it, Gordy and I."

She made no response. As he talked on, about Gordon's chances and how this would pull him through, that sudden poignant feeling left her. "He's not thinking of me," she decided, "but of Gordon and of her. I'm only a little old maid who can help, and then go back where I belong." But at once she almost laughed aloud with contempt for this self-pity of hers. "Isn't that exactly what I

want—to get right out of this, good and quick? And I'm doing it!" Just for a minute her mind ran back over those dreams for a grand new life. Once more, like the shadow of a thought, came the feeling that as her brother's life flowed in again, her own was ebbing. And she smiled.

"They're almost through with me now. And yet—and yet I'm still the one who has got to decide! It's funny!"

CHAPTER VIII

I

As they drew near the theatre in the dense evening traffic, and she saw Leonora's name in sparkling lights up over the entrance, a little feeling of panic came. In the lobby, while Joe was getting the tickets, some women in furs and evening gowns stood close beside her, talking and laughing; and instantly Madge was conscious of her own appearance here—in a street suit, and bareheaded. "I don't care," she told herself. "Why should I, at a time like this?" But it wasn't just a matter of clothes; it was deeper. All her visions of a grand new life had flown away, and she felt her confidence oozing fast; she dreaded what she must do to-night. To hide her confusion, over her face came the mask of composure it had worn in the nobody days; and all at once she was again the prim little woman of Sunday night, who had walked through the Grand Central carrying a suit case.

When they took their seats inside, the curtain was already up, and at once her eyes were fixed on the

stage. She saw a Florida beach, with palmettos, and a vivid blue ocean behind. Leonora, in a group at tea, was flirting with a heavy young man who appeared to be a millionaire. She was gay and vivacious, she was droll. In a moment, at some line she spoke, the house exploded in a laugh so sudden that it made Madge jump, and sent a tingling through her limbs. But the next moment her jaw set hard.

"Yes, but Gordon is dying!" she thought. "Could any woman act like this, if she really cared for him? How could she miss him long if he died? She hasn't it in her—she has this! This is her life—she's made for this—not for loving one man—always——"

Her thoughts ran on, swift, sharp as a knife. But in spite of herself the spell of the scene took hold of her, as she drank in the luxury and glamor here. Her look was still on Leonora's face and figure, supple, lithe. Hat, gloves and slippers—how adorably fresh they were; and oh, what a lovely gown! The rest of the group had left them now; and alone with her young Crœsus, Leonora was leading him on, with a mischievous gleam in her black eyes. She threw back her head and laughed at him. In an instant he leaned forward, seizing both her hands in his. And glancing about her, Madge could see the

same smiling hungry look in the faces of men on every side, as they feasted their eyes upon the stage. Yes, men were certainly all alike! Leonora seemed suddenly brazen, hard. By now in the story it had appeared that she was a young widow here. "Yes, and this is just how she'd be with Gordon's money, if he died!"

A strained vindictive little laugh burst out of Madge; and as her companion gave her a quick uneasy look, she started to clutch his arm and say, "Let's leave now! I've seen enough!" But his expression made her change her mind. "No, I've got to go through with this!" Then down came the curtain, and Joe rose at once and said,

"I know that she will see us. Better come now and not lose any time."

2

He took her around behind the boxes, swung open a heavy iron door and led her into a crowded place of hurried voices, swooping walls. Confused, she followed close behind him to an open dressing room door—and there she stopped abruptly, at sight of Leonora's face. The fresh seductiveness was gone, the face was hard and lined with strain.

The girl did not see Madge at first.

"What is it, Joe? Quick—tell me!"

"He's all right, Nora—I mean he's no worse. But there has been a change. He's conscious."

"Oh! And better, you mean?" As he hesitated, she cried, "Well? Which is it? Better or worse?"

"He's pretty sick, Nora——"

"What do you mean? They're not giving him up, Joe, are they?"

"No."

"Has he—asked for me?"

"Yes," said Joe.

"Oh, Gordy!" As she whispered that, she caught sight of Madge, behind in the dark, outside the door; but she gave no sign of having seen her. In a hard clear voice, she demanded,

"And are they still set on keeping me out?"

"His sister isn't," Joe replied. "And I've brought her here to see you."

He moved aside and Madge came in.

"Oh. Good evening."

"How do you do? I want to talk with you, Miss O'Brien."

Leonora flashed a look, hostile, sharp and questioning, up into the visitor's face. In the meantime, Joe had turned to the door.

"I reckon I'll leave you two alone."

"No! Don't!" Madge begged him. But he was gone. She was trembling now. Stiffly, Leonora said,

"Thank you for coming. Sit down, please. I've so little time—and I've got to make up for the next act."

While her maid was busy with her hair, she was using paint and grease; and as Madge sat down, she noticed her hands. Nerves? They were perfect bundles! "Now she's trying to think what to say —how to handle me," thought Madge. The girl's dark eyes shot another look at her—from the mirror.

"Well," she began, in a low voice, "now that your brother wants me there, will you let me come tonight?"

"That's what I want to talk about. This isn't so simple for me as you think. Gordon's family——"

Leonora broke in: "Oh, you needn't tell me about them!"

"Needn't I?" Madge answered. "Oh, what a pity somebody *didn't* tell you about them—days ago —before you treated them as you did—as so many little nobodies—outsiders you could brush aside."

For a moment there was no reply. Another questioning flash from the mirror. Then, in a desperate humble tone, she heard Leonora say,

"Yes, Miss Cable, I guess you are right. I acted like a little fool—never stopping to think of the way they'd feel. I see it now, and I'm sorry! But don't forget *my* side of it all! Just try to put yourself in my place! You love a man. You've been so close—so close you're simply frantic when you learn that he may die. Then you go to his home, and there you find—you find a lot of strangers—whom he hasn't seen for years! And they can put you out! They can—because they are his family!"

"Yes," said Madge, "I see all that—and I'll admit it's mighty hard. But I've got his life to think of now. I want you please to understand that this isn't any question of morality with me—it's Gordon's life! What he needs is rest! My uncle wants to make him rest by giving him something to quiet him! He says, if I let you into the room, you will only excite him—stir him all up—because your love *has been* like that!"

"I won't do that! I'm not such a fool!" Leonora said impatiently. She winced and gave a little cry. "Anny, for God's sake stop pulling my hair!" While they talked, she had been touching up her lips and cheeks and eyebrows, and giving directions to the

maid. At her exclamation now, Madge retorted steadily,

"How can you tell what you'll do? You may not be able to help yourself—in the state you're in——"

"I tell you I *can* control myself!" the girl cried, almost with a sob.

"You haven't shown it with us," said Madge. "And even if you do succeed, and really try to keep him quiet, can you do it? With you right there, how will he feel? How does he want you? What kind of memories will you bring? Of the accident, to start with—and then of many other times when you two were together." She hesitated, reddening, feeling herself right on the edge of a whole stormy inner world of which she knew nothing. But she went on: "That sort of thing won't help him now. What he needs is something deeper, bigger, steadier —the kind of love that can look steadily right at death."

Out of the mirror came a look, amused, contemptuous, which said, "You ridiculous little old maid—where did you get all this? On the screen?" Madge blushed and went on, speaking faster:

"Remember, please, that's it up to me to decide this, one way or the other! I don't want to—I hate it—I've been dragged in! But now that I'm in, with

my brother's life right in my hands, I'm not going to just step aside till I know I'm not making a mistake! So, if you want to see him to-night, you will have to show me two things—first, that you can control yourself; and second, that you care for him in a much bigger, deeper way than what I've heard!"

"From a coon chauffeur!"

Madge rose from her chair.

"Go on like this, and you'll never see Gordon to-night!" she said. The girl bit her lip.

"I didn't mean to say that!" she replied. Her voice was humble, penitent. But Madge was implacable.

"No, it just burst out of you—because you *can't* control yourself. I'm wondering if you'll be able to do any better with him than with me."

Before Leonora could reply, a voice outside the door announced, "Five minutes, Miss O'Brien."

"All right—all right! Oh, God Almighty! Can't they give me a little time?" As she turned to Madge, her voice was shaking: "I can't go on for my scene like this—I've got to get myself in hand!"

"Then I'll go," said Madge.

"Please don't do that! I haven't begun! For God's sake—please—stay here and wait! I won't be long! And I'll *make* you see! Now that I know

what it is you want—those two things you want to know——"

"But I can come back."

"No—wait right here!"

"Very well—if you wish."

And sitting quite still in her chair, Madge watched the young actress rise and stand while an evening gown was put deftly on with a speed which seemed miraculous. In the meantime, snatching up a tattered "part" from the table, Leonora fixed her eyes on certain lines. In a few moments she went out, and through the open dressing room door Madge could see her standing behind the wing. Her lips were moving rapidly. The voices of two other actors could be heard through the flimsy partition that shut off the scene. There came a line which was her cue; a smile of deep amusement appeared by magic on her face—and Leonora sauntered on. Then her low provocative laugh was heard—and instantly in response a slight murmur of sound from the house. Madge sat bolt upright, listening. How must it feel to hold people like that? A thousand people—maybe more—all listening for your slightest breath, all watching every move you made, your faintest little ghost of a smile! She let her thoughts drift for a while, glad of escape from the question

which she must so soon decide. In the meantime, Anny the maid, a stout, smart-looking woman of middle age, had busied herself about the small room. She went out now, and Madge's eyes went to the low wide table with its disorderly array of toilet articles, large and tiny. What a life! Now again she could hear from the stage the voice of Leonora rising gay and vibrant, and once more from out in front came a quick burst of merriment.

"How can she do it? Acting, is she? Then what was she doing here with me? Acting, too?"

No, that had been real. She remembered the look on the girl's dark face—frightened, desperate, off her high horse. "But this is her job," Madge told herself. "If she were not gay to-night, she wouldn't be earning her salary." Then with the force of a revelation came the thought, "She works hard at it, too, night after night. Yes, when you come to think of it, she's a working woman like me. Only, our jobs aren't quite the same." As Madge recalled the cashier's desk in Hale and Pritchett's dry goods store, her features set in a curious smile. "If Amanda Berry could see me now!" Suddenly it struck her as comic, this idea that Amanda and she and Leonora were all in one great sisterhood. "A school teacher, a cashier and an actress! Quite a

trinity!" she thought. She caught herself up. Rather blasphemous, that. How had *that* idea come popping up? But so many queer ideas and plans had come popping up in these last days. Again there came to her a sense of how, in the searching glare of this crisis, her whole life had been revealed—with so many old beliefs and standards crowded out by new desires, lost in the whirl. And it was a little startling. But there was satisfacion in it, too. She recalled how she had handled the talk with Leonora just now. "At least," she thought, "I've made her feel I'm not a strait-laced little Puritan." Still listening to the voice on the stage, she had again a sudden sense of Leonora's warm rich life. Her eyes were on the wide low table, and moving slightly in her chair she could see her own face in the mirror there. She began to detect the wrinkles. Middle age was creeping on. And Madge sat looking at herself and listening to the voice outside.

"I wonder what she'll have to tell me, and which way I shall decide? I wonder what will become of me then—where I'll be in a week from now?" With a grim smile at herself, she replied, "But who in the whole world cares about that? I don't know as I do myself—exactly."

Anny, the stout, quiet maid, came back and began to get ready for the next change. In a minute or two, a burst of clapping told that the curtain had come down. Then up again it went for a moment—and again. Madge could tell it by the applause, and she pictured Leonora out there. But when a little later the girl came quickly into the room, the look on her dark oval face was tense and haggard as before.

"Thank you for waiting—Madge," she said.

Madge started at the sound of her name, but the other took no notice of that. She sat down at once and began with her make-up. Her voice was carefully quiet:

"I've been trying to see your side of this, and how you feel—and I think I do now. I've been horribly stupid and clumsy about it—a perfect little beast to you. And you're mighty decent to do what you've done. In spite of those relatives of yours, you're honestly trying to do what is fair, and best for Gordon. But what do you know? They give you some stories from a chauffeur—and you tie that up with what you've read in the papers—or seen in the movies—and——"

"Never mind me," Madge interrupted. "We haven't very much time, you know. Let's come to

the point. Do you love my brother enough so that you can do what is needed to-night? I don't care if you marry or not. All I want to know is whether your love is big enough and steady enough to save his life. If you love him in the way I mean, I've been wondering how you can be acting in a play of this kind, when he's at the point of death? Of course it's your profession, I know. But——"

"It's more than that!" was the quick reply. "This play of mine is just as near the point of death as he is!"

Madge looked at her in surprise.

"It doesn't seem to be!" she said

"No, it doesn't seem to be! The house looks crowded! But you didn't know that half of it at least is 'paper'—I mean, people who don't pay!"

"But—the applause!" insisted Madge.

"Yes, there's a very good chance for it still. But I've got to work every minute and every second I'm on the stage! And that's what I've been doing—Monday, Tuesday, and now to-night! And I've just learned from out in front there's six hundred dollars in the house! That's better! The business is picking up—and if we can keep on like this, shoving it up and up each night, we'll save it yet! Do you understand?"

"But," said Madge, with a blank look, "if it's only a little money to tide it over, that you need—my brother is worth millions!"

She caught a queer little glance from the mirror; but when Leonora spoke, her tone once more was carefully quiet:

"I see. You thought he was supporting me—that all this actress love of mine was bought and paid for."

"No!" said Madge. "I didn't think that! I only meant——"

"Why shouldn't you? Don't think I'm getting excited again. I'm not. I say, why shouldn't you? You know we're not married, and you've heard some things about us—and they're true. So you ask, 'What kind of love is that?' And that is what I've got to explain—I've got to make you see how I feel. What *is* loving a man—what does it mean? Can't you—without marrying him? You don't believe so."

"You're wrong!" said Madge. "I've already told you I don't care whether or not you marry——"

"Yes—I heard you"—with a smile—"but way down inside of you, Madge, you're more old fashioned than you know. Now please let me make my point. He wanted to marry, but I refused—not

because I take any stock in these fool notions *against* getting married—not at all! But he wanted me to give up the stage! And I wouldn't! It's my job! I'm not even sure that I would now! But I do love him!" she went on. "And what I mean by that," she said, "is not what they've been telling you! I've done all that, and I'm not in the least ashamed that I have. It was the best that I could do, unless I gave up my career. And there was more in it than you've heard. Your brother and I loved music—and every chance that we could get, at a concert or an opera, we just grabbed, as a regular spree! And we both loved beautiful dancing, too—you know what I mean?—the Russian kind. And last summer we cruised way up the Sound, in a little boat he rented—cooked our breakfasts, lived out of doors, fished, swam and talked and talked and talked of a trip we wanted to make to Japan. And that was only one of the plans! And all this sort of thing went into the way we loved one another—understand? And all this is in his mind to-night! Those memories you're afraid of——"

Again the call-boy came around.

"Five minutes, Miss O'Brien."

She threw a glance at Madge's face, and went on with sudden tension,

"Look here. If I had time, I know I could make you see all this in another way—for you've made me feel that you're not strait-laced or narrow or blind to the way ideas are changing everything in a woman's life—and so we could get together on this. But there isn't time, and there's no need. Because you're fair. You're not the kind to step in between your brother and me. That's *our* affair. He may die to-night! You won't keep me away from him—if he wants me—more and more. And he does—I tell you I know, I know! I've meant a lot in his life! You haven't! In all these months together I've barely heard him mention your name!" Madge stiffened at this, but the tone in which the words were spoken took out the sting. It was desperate, pleading, rapid and low. "And those other relatives—they're all outsiders—nothing more! They may have been close to him when he was small—in the little old world of long ago which you and I have left behind—but it isn't a child, it's a man that's dying! And he wants me—wants me—and that's all you need to know! That it's Gordon's life—not yours or theirs—and that he has a right to do as he likes!"

"Yes, if it doesn't kill him!" said Madge. Her face was flushed and trembling. "Are you abso-

lutely sure that you can be quiet with him tonight?"

"I will— I can! If I haven't made you feel it now, it's just because I've had no time—and because I'm pretty near the point where I want to break right down and cry. But I haven't—and I've shown you that I can control all that! And I will if I see him—I can—I can!"

Madge had risen from her seat. For just a moment longer she stood there, trembling, watching.

"I guess you'd better come," she said.

"Thank you, Madge! God bless you, dear!"

"No thanks at all. Remember your promise. It's to be quiet." She stopped, with a frown. "The main thing is that it's none of my business—and I ought to have seen it before. Now I'll be going."

"One thing more! May I see him alone? Will you keep those others out of the room?"

"Yes, I'll try to keep them out. But you get there just as soon as you can!"

3

When again she was left alone, Madge stood staring. "No," she thought, "I'm not going to take it on myself to stand between them any more. . . . I must go back now. Joe will be waiting."

But as she started to leave the room, again she heard Leonora's voice from the stage; and she stopped to listen. The voice was cold and indifferent now. In the second act the two lovers had quarreled, and they had still to make it up. Leonora was keeping him off. "Yes," thought Madge, "she certainly can control herself—out there on the stage. But with Gordon, in his room—that will be different—that will be real!" She felt a twinge of sharp suspense; then once more her mind let go. Out on the stage they were rapidly coming into the big scene of the play; and as Leonora's low rich voice began to rise, Madge remembered how the girl had asked her, "What do you know? They give you some stories from a chauffeur, and you tie them up with what you've read in the papers—seen in the movies." The voice was like a challenge now. "What do you know about loving a man? Think of your life. Cashier in a store in a dull little town—and you live in a flat with varnished stairs—and you're already thirty-two. Men? Love? For you?" Leonora's voice had ceased; the voice of her lover was speaking. And looking into the mirror and asking, "What man ever spoke to me, or will ever speak to me, like that?"—Madge gave a hard little laugh.

"Oh, for goodness sake let's try to use some common sense! Now to get out of this and back home! Back to business!" she told herself.

On the ride back, in the taxi, she listened to what Joe was saying, in a friendly anxious tone; and she thought, "He's bucking me up for what I've still to go through when I reach the apartment." When they arrived at the door, he said,

"I'll go back to the theatre. The play will be about over then, and I'll have her here in half an hour."

"The sooner the better," Madge replied.

4

She went up to the apartment and found her relatives in the front room. Her Uncle Phil looked up from his paper.

"Well, Madge?" he asked.

"Uncle," she said, "I've made up my mind that I don't care to take the risk of going any longer against Gordon's wishes here."

"You mean you want Miss O'Brien to come. Have you seen her?"

"Yes——"

"Where?"

"At the theatre."

"Did she give you a fine performance, Madge?" her cousin asked, with irony.

"It wasn't acting, Ray—it was real!"

"And she is coming to-night, I suppose," said Uncle Phil.

"Yes—very soon!"

Aunt Abby rose from her chair and said,

"Then I for one don't care to be here."

"Easy now, Mother," said her son. "Sit down, won't you, and give us a chance. Let's try to get together on this." His manner was suddenly friendly, appealing. "Look here, Madge, don't get sore about this. If you promised this young flapper she could come, that settles it. The only thing left for us to do is to fix things so she won't be able to put through any crooked work."

"I tell you, Ray, you're wrong—absolutely! The thought of Gordon's money doesn't even enter her head!"

He threw her a look of exasperation, but in a patient voice he said,

"All right, all right—don't get excited. Now listen, Madge—I've been giving this a good long think while you were gone. We guessed what you were up to, of course. And I figured out that your trouble began when we put the lady out last night.

We did handle her rough—I'll admit it—at least it looked that way to you—and you've been stand-offish ever since. But how do you know we could help ourselves? What do you know of this kind of a woman? They're *used* to being treated rough! At a dance they don't have any fun at all till they're grabbed and swung over a man's head! That's the kind of girl she is! You say this isn't a bunkum game—but we think it is. How do you know that we're all wrong? Are you so everlastingly cock-sure, that you can go it blind—kick all your rights and ours aside?"

"Yes, Ray, I'm very, very sure—that Gordon's life is his own affair—and that now when his mind is perfectly clear——"

"All right, all right, then let her in! But it isn't too late to fix this yet! If one of us stays in the room——"

The thought flashed into Madge's mind: "So *that's* what they planned while I was gone!" Aloud she said,

"I'm afraid it can't be done. I promised to leave her with him alone."

"She was able to make you promise her that? Oh, Madge—Madge!" said Mrs. Dwight.

"Yes, Aunt Abby!" Madge's voice had an omi-

nous ring, but Ray did not hear it. He had turned to Uncle Phil, and he said,

"Guess that proves it, doesn't it?"

"Yes, she seems to be after the money, all right."

"Oh, stop thinking of money—money!" Madge cried harshly, springing up. "We've thought of nothing else all week!" There came a low cry from her aunt, but Madge was confronting the two men. "Isn't that why you came?" she asked. "Would you have come if he had been poor? And would you be so anxious now—about this girl—and Gordon's morals? Did you ever care before?"

"Did I ever care before?" cried Aunt Abby, in a loud quivering voice. "You talk about Gordon's money *to me?* Did I think of it when he was small, and I nursed him time and time again? Who taught him his prayers, and tried to make him see what is right and what is wrong? You talk of his money bringing *me* here?"

"Aunt Abby!" cried Madge, almost in tears.

"Now sit down in that chair and listen to me! Don't just be ashamed of yourself—that's not enough! There is still time to correct your mistake! A mistake, I call it, because I know that you are trying to do your best. But in these last days you've grown to feel you know it all, and the rest of us can

be shoved aside! Now you attend to what I say! Gordon has sinned with this woman! That's plain and clear—she doesn't deny it! And now he's dying and you are about to let him sin with her again! Instead of protecting him when he's weak, and lifting up his eyes to his God, you're letting them turn to the carnal charms of an actress, and by a few hot words of passion give her a claim which will rob us all and send him to his Maker with that stain upon his soul! Have you ever stopped to think of that—of how he will feel face to face with his God—and with his everlasting life?"

Uncle Phil looked at his watch.

"We haven't time for that now," he said. "What we've got to think about is a plain matter of right and wrong. What you seem to lack, my dear," he said quietly to Madge, "is a good old-fashioned sense of family and family rights. Here's this lad risen out of us—bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. We were able to help him—we gave him his start. In spite of that, in the flush of success, he has completely forgotten us all. Have we ever spoken out in complaint? No, this is a free country and his life was his own affair. But this is different—this is death. You are not a physician—I am, and I know. I'm telling you now that, since

you left, his condition has grown so much worse that the chances are at least ten to one he won't live through the night. At such a time, we can do no less than try to prevent you from letting this woman rob you of what is rightfully yours. And the way to prevent it is simple enough. Let her come—let her see him—but not alone. If I am there, I assure you——"

"No, Uncle Phil." Her voice was low, but it shook a little in spite of herself, as she faced the eyes angrily turned on hers. "I may be wrong—but it seems to me as clear as day that he has a right to see her alone. All the more if he's dying, as you say. Doctor Hoyt does not agree with you there—and I have that to think of, too. There are quite a lot of things that I have to think of!" She stopped an instant, clinched her hands. "But each time I look away, at any other side of this, I come right back to where I was! He has a right to see her alone if he wants it! And I'm just as sure he wants it as though I went and asked him! But I will ask him, if you say——"

"I tell you the man don't know what he wants! He's half out of his mind!" her cousin cried.

"Then, Ray, you'll have to leave it to me."

"Phil," said Aunt Abby harshly, "do you mean

to say you can't go in that room—just because Madge is so utterly blind?"

"No, Aunt Abby—he can't go in," Madge answered, in a steady tone. "I'm Gordon's sister, and I'm the one who will decide this, if you please."

As she spoke, the door bell rang. She said, "Thank Heaven, they've come at last!"—and went quickly into the hall.

5

But Doctor Hoyt was at the door. He smiled at the violent start she gave.

"How's the patient?"

"Worse, I'm afraid!"

"Let's have a look at him," he said.

He went into Gordon's room, and after a brief examination came out with her into the hall.

"Yes, your brother is worse," he said, "but no more so than I expected."

Again there was a ring at the door.

"Oh, wait, please—she's here at last!" said Madge. She ran to the door and opened it. "Come in, please—Doctor Hoyt is here!"

Leonora came in, with Joe behind her.

"Is there any change?"

"Yes—he's worse! Now listen, please!" Madge

turned to the surgeon. "I want you to tell her, Doctor Hoyt, how terribly necessary it is that she keep him very quiet to-night!"

"I do tell you that, Miss O'Brien," he said. "His whole life will depend on it."

"Very well—I understand. . . . But if he's kept quiet—is there still a chance?"

"There is!"

Leonora turned away.

When Hoyt had left, and Leonora had gone into Gordon's room, Madge found herself in the hall with Joe Evans.

"Don't you want me to stay and help?" he asked, with a glance toward the living room.

"No, thank you—I'll get along all right."

"Yes," he said, "I reckon you will." He hesitated, and took her hand. "And I reckon you've saved Gordon's life! I'll never forget it!"

She winced and drew back.

"Never mind me! Good-night!" she said.

When he was gone, she stood there a moment to steady herself. When Joe took her hand, she had felt as though she wanted to cry. She waited till she was steady again, and then went into the living room.

The three of them were sitting there very much

as they had before—Ray at the window, Uncle Phil reading, Aunt Abby with her hands in her lap. But Madge felt at once a difference, and glancing at them she told herself, "Yes, now that it's decided, they will all be quiet enough. They hate a scene as much as I." She sat down, and in a moment took her knitting from the table close by. She started to knit; then abruptly she stopped, her eyes arrested, and with a grim smile she scanned her work. Oh, what awful work it was! Dropped stitches and uneven rows—everything higgledy-piggledy! As in a book, the record was here of her changing moods —of her desperate straining for what to do, of the sudden warm disturbing dreams and all those castles in the air.

A gentle clicking made her look up, and she saw that her Aunt Abby was composedly knitting, too. She wanted to look closer and see if the work that her aunt had been doing was any smoother than her own.

"I wonder what they're thinking?" she asked. "They can't be such born idiots as to be sure that Leonora is going to act like a movie vamp. They know that she may do nothing at all, and that Gordon may still die to-night. If he does, how sorry they'll try to be—but oh, how happy underneath!"

Aunt Abby dropped her needles and sat staring at the wall.

"No," thought Madge, with a twinge of compunction, "it's rotten of me to be thinking like this. If he lives, she will go down on her knees. How queer it all is. Thank Heaven, I'm through with my part of it. There's nothing to do now but wait." And she went on with her knitting. "Funny. It feels—all over now." With a smile she felt how far she had dropped in the regard of her family. Gone was all that friendliness, and in its place was grim contempt. "They've put me down as a little fool—without sense enough to protect myself." Already she could see how it would be when they all went back to Halesburg.

Yet in the cool dim room, she knew, might come any moment an event which would lift her again into the place where she had been the night before.

At last the silence was broken by Ray, who came back from the window, sat down and lit a cigarette, and picked up an evening paper. As his mother turned and watched him, she looked suddenly very old.

"Phil," she asked, in a moment, "how long do you suppose she'll stay?"

"All night, I should say," he answered.

Mrs. Dwight turned to her son.

"Then I think, Ray, you'd better go out and get me a room in that hotel where you are staying."

"No, I won't, Mother—you go to bed. You look all in," he answered.

"Yes, Aunt Abby," Madge put in, "do go and try to get some rest."

Her aunt threw a quick look at her, then began folding up her work.

"Rest?" Her voice was now so low as to be almost inaudible. "A precious lot of rest I'll have —for the remainder of my days." She got up with her knitting and cast a look toward Gordon's room. "Seems funny she should be allowed to take from us what is ours. I wonder what God thinks of such things?"

And she went slowly to her room.

A little later Ray took his departure and Doctor Cable went to bed. Neither of them had spoken to Madge. She went and looked into Gordon's room, and saw him sleeping quietly. Leonora sat by his side. Closing the door softly, she went to her own room and undressed.

"Yes, she'll keep him quiet enough—and he'll be

better to-morrow," she thought. "I wonder why I don't seem to care? . . . Too dead tired—I guess that's it."

And a few minutes later she was asleep.

CHAPTER IX

I

SHE woke up late. The glorious light of a clear sunny November day was streaming in; the air was crisp. For a time she lay with her eyes closed and her mind only half awake, with mingled feelings of relief and rest and curiosity. "I know he's better. Now what next?" Rising up from deep within her she could feel a consciousness of some splendid change which was coming in her own existence; but she could not put it in words, nor did she even care to try. She got up and went into Gordon's room. Miss Cochran was sitting by the bed, and Leonora lay asleep in a big chair by the window. Gordon, too, was sleeping.

"He's better, isn't he?" whispered Madge.

"Oh, yes, Miss Cable."

"I'm so glad."

For a moment Madge and the young nurse smiled at one another. "What a gorgeous day!" she thought. The room had been kept dark for the sleepers, but through the curtains fell one shaft of

the light that was flooding the heavens outside. Madge looked at Leonora. The head thrown back showed the dark circles under the eyes. With relief, she told herself, "Oh, I'm so glad I let her come!"

She went back and dressed herself. She could hear Aunt Abby in her room and Uncle Phil in the study. Then the door bell rang. It was Ray, from his hotel nearby. She remembered his speaking of the price they charged him for his room, and she began to reckon the cost of this trip for Ray and his mother. Gordon would probably make that right—but she wondered if they would accept it now. She hoped that her Aunt Abby would be more friendly than last night.

And at breakfast she found that it was so. Though they knew that Gordon was better and that Leonora was with him still, in each of them Madge thought she could feel a decided change. The strain of these days had been too hard, and the vision too intense; and so now, as the spell which had bound them all relaxed its hold, each one appeared to be rather relieved to feel himself slowly slipping back into his old familiar life. "Their eyes look natural," she thought. That queer look was out of them. Millions. The dreams had come and gone, and the hunger hidden in each breast had sunk again

to its hiding place. They began to talk of going home.

A few minutes later, Joe Evans called up; and when she gave him the good news, the sudden joy of relief in him went into her like the shaft of light which she had seen in her brother's room.

"I'll be up this afternoon," he said. "I've got to be in the office till then—though it *is* a holiday."

"A holiday?"

"Yes—Thanksgiving Day!"

She gave a strained little laugh and said,

"Well, that seems to just fit in!"

She had hardly left the telephone when the doctor arrived. She asked him to wait, while she hurried into Gordon's room and awakened the girl asleep in the chair. Leonora sat up with an anxious start, but Madge reassured her.

"Doctor Hoyt is here," she said, "and I want you to come into my room. There's nothing for you to worry about, and you'd better try to finish your sleep. You've been up all night and you look tired."

"I am," said Leonora; and as they went into Madge's room she added, "You'll tell me what he says?"

"Of course—but I'm sure it will be good news."

And Madge went back to Doctor Hoyt. His examination of Gordon was brief.

"Your brother is so much stronger now, that if he goes on another day he'll be well out of danger," he said.

Suddenly to her surprise Madge felt herself trembling.

"I want to thank you, Doctor Hoyt, for giving me such good advice."

He threw a keen look at her and smiled.

"Oh, I think you deserve the main credit," he said.

When she told the news to her relatives, they took it in the same calm spirit they had shown at breakfast. Aunt Abby had on her old shoulder cape, for Ray was taking her to church.

"I suppose you'll want to stay here, Madge."

"Yes, Aunt Abby."

"Phil, how about you? Are you coming?"

"Why, yes, I think I will."

"That's nice. Better hurry or we'll be late."

In a few minutes they were gone.

"And when she gets to church," thought Madge, "she'll thank God for saving Gordon's life—and then she'll pray that he be shown what a sinful life he has been leading. . . . I wonder if God will

hear her prayer? I wonder if there is any God who in any way resembles the God whom she believes in?"

Suddenly, as her mind went back over the last days and nights, and she felt again the grip of those dreams, the idea came that in all the confusion and change of this age the only god left was Money. But she dismissed it with a smile.

"No," she thought, "it's more than that. Look at this queer week we've spent. It wasn't just Money that drove us mad, but a Spirit of Dreams inside of us. And I guess that's where God comes in—at least, the one that I believe in. He's new and vague to me as yet, but He isn't just a dollar sign. For it isn't only Money I want—no, I want a bigger life. And what's more, I may get it still—money or no!" She grew excited at the idea. "I may," she thought, "I certainly may! This isn't over for me yet! I wonder what I'm going to do?"

2

Then Gordon woke up and sent for her. She found him staring up at the ceiling, as he had the day before; but he looked stronger, more clear eyed. When he saw her, he smiled and reached out his hand.

"Come here—I want to talk to you, Madge."

"All right—but you musn't talk too long."

"Oh, you needn't worry now. I'm so much better than I was—and I want you to know how I feel about this." His eyes went again to the ceiling, and she saw a humorous curl on his lip. "I've been thinking it all out," he said. "You must have had a rotten time. Uncle Phil, Aunt Abby and young Ray—all right at your heels—on the trail of my money."

She drew back a little, and in a voice rather cold she said,

"I don't think that's very kind in you, Gordon."

He turned a quizzical look on her.

"Maybe not—but it's funny," he answered.

"I don't think so!"

All at once she felt herself trembling again—and she frowned. "What's the matter with me to-day?" Then she heard her brother say,

"For the fact of the matter is, I'm broke."

She made a quick movement.

"Why—what do you mean?"

"I mean I'm poor. Barely money to pay the rent."

She stared at him in astonishment.

"Then all those things we heard were lies?"

"No—I did make money—plenty. In the big year after the Armistice, it came rolling in so fast I didn't know how much I had. But we couldn't get out of ships in time—we got caught with quite a fleet. And so, by the time of the accident, we were right on the edge of a crash. . . . Poor old Joe," said Gordon. "He's had a terrible time this week."

"But why——" she turned abruptly. "Why couldn't he have told us so? It would have——" she checked herself.

"Yes," said her brother grimly, "it would have made things easier. They wouldn't have been so careful then about keeping people out of this room. But you see," he added, with a smile, "it's a kind of a religion of ours to keep up a front. If we don't, we're gone. The banks would be down on us in a minute. And if Joe had told you, what would Uncle Phil have done? Can't you see him—insisting at once upon an investigation into every dollar I have?"

"Yes," said Madge.

"If he had, it would have finished us. And Joe knew that, so he couldn't peep. And there were some things that I knew and he didn't—and *had* to know—in certain law suits we are in. And here I lay like a log. It was tough. Joe stood the gaff and has got through; he says we're still a going

concern. But if I had died, we'd have busted. See? Not only because of those things I knew, but because I've done the driving—the money is *in me,* so to speak." He stopped short. The effort of speaking had caused a throb of pain in his head; but it passed, and smiling he went on, "A doctor over in France once told me, 'Brag, my son. It's good for you.' I'm bragging now—and it's good for me. I've got millions of dollars, Madge, right in this little old head of mine—and I'm very much obliged, my dear, for keeping me alive as you did——"

"I didn't do very much," she said.

"Oh, yes, you did. I can see it—the whole queer funny week," he replied, "with all the rest of my kith and kin on the scent of my millions—which were gone!"

Once more he turned on her his quizzical eyes.

"Now can't you smile a little, Madge?"

"Yes—a little——"

And she did.

"But it isn't so *very* funny—when you think of Aunt Abby," she went on, "and the life she has had—and what a change a little money would have brought."

"I know," he said. "I've been pretty rotten to neglect her as I have—and I'll do better after this

—honest I will." He squeezed her hand. "But I'd like to tell *Uncle Phil* the joke."

"No—don't!"

"Why not? If he hasn't changed, I think it will rather appeal to him. Uncle Phil used to have quite a sense of humor—nice and noiseless, but all there. Where is he now?"

"They're all at church."

"What? The devil! Sunday already?"

"No—Thanksgiving Day," she said.

He looked at her a moment and then sharply shut his eyes.

"Now try to get some more sleep," she said. "Leonora is resting in my room. She was up all night, you know."

"Thanks, Madgy. Oh, you've been so good." But as she rose to leave, he added, with a shadow of a smile, "Remember, when they come from church, to tell Uncle Phil that I want to see him."

3

Madge came out of her brother's room and sank limply into a chair. So there hadn't been any money!

Presently a memory rose of how she had sat here just like this when she arrived. "And that was only Sunday night!" Her mind ran over the memories.

Up and up and up she had soared, into a new existence. With a look of curious interest now, her mind turned in upon herself. As she thought of the desires and dreams which flaming up had changed her in the twinkling of an eye—had made her, in her fancy, young and fresh and attractive again, and surrounded by admirers; a gracious benefactress to her family and her town; a great club woman in New York and the head of a big Fifth Avenue shop; a leader in European relief, saving lives by thousands, hob-nobbing with ministers, kings and queens—Madge laughed softly to herself.

"I didn't know I had all *that* inside of me," she thought. "Well, what shall I do about it now? . . . Oh, let it wait."

She did not care to think it out. She could feel herself so pleasantly drifting on to some new life—and she did not want to spoil it all by facing the realities.

She heard Leonora stirring, and thought, "I suppose she knew it all along—about his money. I wonder?" She went and ordered breakfast for her, and presently the girl came out. Her whole expression was changed to-day; the nervous tension was out of her face.

"Come and sit with me—won't you, Madge?"

"Very well—if you like."

As Madge sat down at the table, on her features there had come the old mask of composure; and over her coffee Leonora threw a curious glance at her.

"I'm sorry for the way I acted," she began in a moment. "I don't see how you stood it as well as you did—the way I tried to sail right in and order all of you about. But you understand now, don't you?"

"Yes," said Madge, "I guess I do. And I don't blame you in the least."

"I blame myself. I've been a young fool. But I've learned my lesson now, all right—and as soon as Gordon is well enough I'll marry him."

Madge looked quickly up.

"I'm very glad of that," she said.

"Not that I care about marriage, you know," Leonora confided, "but I'm not going to take a chance of ever being put again in any such position. It was pretty tough—on both of us."

There was a pause.

"How about the stage?" asked Madge.

"Oh, I guess I can make him see that now. With his business as it is, he'd have a hard time supporting me."

"Why didn't you tell us about his business?"

"I started to—but then I remembered a promise I'd made him—not to mention it to a soul. So I asked Joe, and he said, 'For Pete's sake, not a word!'" Leonora smiled. "So there we were—poor old Joe working day and night to keep alive the business, while you were keeping Gordon alive and I was keeping my play alive. We seem to have won, all along the line!"

"Yes," said Madge, "it seems that way."

Her companion lit a cigarette and leaned forward on her elbow.

"Look here, Madge," she inquired, "what are you going to do now?"

"Go back, I guess."

"Why don't you stay on?"

"I would, if he were in any danger—but I guess by to-night he'll be safe enough, and I think I'll take the morning train."

"Why? Why not stay with us here? We'd both love to have you—and you might get to like this town. It isn't just all fluff, you know—there are jobs here and new ideas that would take right hold of you. I'll bet there are hundreds of women like you pouring in here every week."

"Yes," said Madge. "I've felt them."

"What?"

"I've felt them—these last days and nights." Madge's voice was clear and low. "Girls, women, all ages and all kinds. We're all of us changing pretty fast. From Aunt Abby to what? A thousand things. I guess I'll be making some move before long. This has given me the shake-up I needed to get me out of the rut I was in."

But as she went on to talk of herself she felt the attention of her companion slip away, and so she stopped. Leonora glanced at the clock and rose.

"Hello—it's nearly one," she said, "and I've got a matinée. I must hurry!"

When she left a little later, she said,

"I'll be back about five. Will you be here then?"

"Yes. Good-by—good luck to the play."

Once more Madge was left sitting alone—but she rather enjoyed it. A curious and intent expression crept into her eyes, and she asked herself,

"What is it I am waiting for?"

4

When the others came back from church, Aunt Abby's face was all serene—as though she had found peace again and were ready to go on with her

life. She went into her room to take off her cape, and then Uncle Phil inquired,

"Has Miss O'Brien gone yet, Madge?"

"Yes." Madge hesitated, and said, "She has made up her mind to marry him now."

Doctor Cable smiled a bit.

"I supposed she would," he said.

"Now he's thinking of the money again," Madge told herself. And aloud she said,

"Gordon wants to see you, Uncle."

"Very well."

And he went into Gordon's room. He left the door open. From where she sat, she could just hear the sound of their voices. "I wonder how he'll take it?" she asked. After all, it was not easy. Pretty awkward—pretty grim. But when he came out a few minutes later, she caught in her uncle's hard blue eyes a gleam of relish.

"Ray," he said, "come in here, please."

They went into the study. This time Doctor Cable shut the door, and Madge heard nothing; but when they came out, Ray went straight to the telephone, and she heard her uncle say,

"Ray is finding out about trains."

She smiled a little, in spite of herself. Ray was always practical!

"I think there is one about three o'clock," Uncle Phil continued. "I'll go and speak to your Aunt Abby. Gordon is out of danger now, and I see no need of our staying here any longer. Will you come along?"

"No, I'll wait till to-morrow," she said.

He gave his niece a queer little look as though asking, "How much did you know about this?" For a moment she thought he was going to speak; but Aunt Abby came in just then, and Ray came back from the telephone; and while he was telling his mother that there was a train at three twenty-five, old Abe appeared, to say dinner was ready. Over the face of Uncle Phil crept a quiet ironical smile.

"Now," he said, "we can sit down to a good old-fashioned Thanksgiving Dinner."

And some faint semblance of that smile was still lurking on his lips, as at table he bowed his head and said, "For what we are about to receive may the good Lord make us thankful." A moment's silence. Then raising her eyes Madge saw that her aunt's were glistening.

"Oh, what a blessed relief it is!" said Aunt Abby softly. "I'll be so glad to get back home!"

"And she means it—every word," thought Madge. But as they began talking of home affairs,

there came to her a realization of what they would all have to face when they got back to Halesburg. "So you missed the money, eh?" Nobody would say it in so many words, but everyone would *look* it. "It won't be easy," she told herself. She guessed that the same unpleasant thought was running through their minds as well; and she could feel all three of them, each in his own way, beginning to get ready just quietly to face it out. For a moment she rather admired them—but abruptly her thoughts came to herself. "And how about me?" Their share of the silent derision would be as nothing compared to her own. She grew a little sick at the prospect.

"What are your plans, Madge?" her uncle inquired.

She looked up and caught them watching her—not at all maliciously, but with a pity which was worse. It said so plainly, "Poor old Madgy. Back to the store, and to the flat."

"Why, I hadn't thought about it," she said. "I don't know yet just what I'll do—but I'll be coming home to-morrow, I think, by the first train. Do you happen to have a time table, Ray?"

"Yes—sure—I'll look up a train," he said kindly.

After dinner, they were soon ready to start.

"Good-by, Madgy—see you soon," said Ray. "There's a train to-morrow at eight."

"Thank you, Ray. Good-by, Auntie."

"Good-by, my dear child—God bless you!" Aunt Abby kissed her suddenly.

"Come in for supper Sunday night, my dear," said her uncle, gripping her hand.

"Thanks, Uncle, I will."

But she smiled at that. She had gone there for supper on Sunday night for so many, many years.

"And it will be worse now," she reflected, when the door had closed behind them. She stood staring. "Yes, it will be pretty awful—in their homes and at the store and on the street—wherever I go."

For a time in her fancy she saw herself doing the old familiar things, and just how awful it would be. What a drop from the grand vistas which had opened up this week! Worse than before, a hundred times! . . . But as she stood there, into her face crept a curious look of surprise. For the first dismay had passed so quickly. It seemed to have no hold, all that—as though in reality she would not have to face it at all. Well then, why not? But she did not try to answer. It was so much pleasanter just to let herself drift along with this vague anticipation, without risking its collapse by examining it too soon.

5

She heard a key turned in the door outside, and her pulse began to quicken. "Oh, what a little fool you are. There's nothing in that," she told herself; and she rose as Joe Evans came into the room.

"Hello," he said, with a friendly smile. "Gordon still coming along in good shape?"

"Yes," she replied. "He's sleeping now, I think."

As she looked at Joe, she pitied him for the way he would feel when he learned that Gordon was to be married. But it was not only pity she felt—there was suspense and excitement, too.

"Where are the others?" he inquired.

"All gone home to Halesburg."

Joe's satisfaction was quite plain.

"And is Leonora here?"

"No—she's at the theatre. Thanksgiving matinée, you know."

He gave a little laugh and said,

"Well, Miss Cable, thank God for you! If it hadn't been for the way that you came through for us last night, I reckon he wouldn't be living now. But it wasn't any surprise to me. From that first night I found you here, I knew we-all could count on you."

"Oh, please!" she said, in a low voice, as Joe stood smiling down at her. "It's over now!" And then, in a more natural tone, "How splendidly it has all turned out. Sit down, please. Don't you want to smoke?"

When he was comfortably settled in a big chair with a cigarette, she asked,

"How's the business getting on now?"

Joe threw a quizzical look at her.

"Has Gordy told you about that?"

"Yes, but not your side of it."

And soon she had him telling her about the fight he had made alone. He had barely left the office, he said; one night he had stayed there and slept in his clothes. She listened with a look intent. She had picked up her knitting now and her needles were working rapidly. Again she wondered how he would feel at the news that Gordon was to be married. He had so few interests, so few friends. For a moment she had a revealing sense of his spirit groping on through the various stages of his life. Money —then more money. Would he grow accustomed to city life? No. She remembered his dream of a ranch, as soon as he got money enough. Would he go alone or with a wife? Just for a minute a picture rose of a man and a woman riding at dusk

over a stretch of rolling upland, with a big round yellow moon rising over the rim of the hills. And she heard his deep soft Southern voice singing a prairie lullaby to the huge beasts that he called "little doggies." Sharply she drew in her breath and went on knitting, with a frown. . . . But all this time she had kept him talking, by the questions that she asked, in a voice low and sympathetic.

"It must have been pretty awful," she said. "I wish I could have helped you."

"You help me?" he retorted. "I reckon it's just the other way. I mean that I've been telling you this so you won't put me down as a slacker for keeping away as much as I did—instead of being here helping you—to clear up this Leonora business."

"Well, it's cleared up now," said Madge. She kept her eyes upon her work. "She says she's going to marry him."

For a moment Joe said nothing, but trembling she could feel the news go into him with a stab of pain.

"She told you that?" he asked. "How soon?"

"As soon as he is strong enough."

Again there was a silence.

"I knew they'd come to it," he said.

"You mustn't let that separate you and Gordon,"

she replied. "The feeling you two men have for each other—well, it's pretty wonderful."

"Yes," he said. And after a pause, "It'll never be the same again."

"Where will you live?" she asked him.

"Oh, in some hotel, I guess."

"What a pity."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a poor way of living, it seems to me. I should think you'd get mighty sick of it."

"Yes," he said, discouragedly, "I reckon I will."

"Then why do it?" she asked, with a cheerful air. "Why don't you get a man or two to live with you, in a nice little house, with a woman to take care of you all?"

"I haven't many friends," he said. "I've only been here three or four years—and I reckon you don't quite realize what life in this city can be like. It's not like a small town, where you get to know people." She flushed at this, but he did not notice. "You can keep to yourself and nobody cares. That's the way I've found it."

"But you haven't been here long," she retorted, rather sharply, "and I feel so sure that life in New York can be anything you choose to make it. There's something quite thrilling to me in that. If I were

here I'd want to make friends—and go about and see things—try things!" She caught a curious look in his eyes. "Now he's a little surprised!" she thought.

"How do you mean?" she heard him ask. She frowned. She did not know, exactly. Besides, she was finding it rather hard to keep cool and to think clearly.

"Oh, it isn't easy to put it in words. But with so many millions of people here—all sorts and kinds —Americans and foreigners—people making money fast and throwing it all over the place—then losing it—all ups and downs—there must be some funny specimens here, who would make you scream with laughter—and others who would make you cry. Some who don't care for money at all—people with queer dreams inside. People who would make wonderful friends. And very lonely people, too." In the silence she felt how that sank in. "Yes," she ended, "I'd want friends if I were here."

"I reckon you'd have 'em!'

The way he said that made something leap inside of her; but she kept her eyes on her work and said, in a voice even and composed,

"And then I'd want to do things, too."

And she began to confide to him how she had

dreamed of a business career. But presently she heard him say,

"It doesn't seem jest the life for a woman. I guess I'm old fashioned about such things—havin' been raised in Tennessee. But women who get into business life—well, I've seen quite a few in this town—and it seems to kind of harden 'em."

"Oh," said Madge, "they needn't stick to it all their lives—but I've always thought a girl ought to know things at first hand. She may marry later. All right. But then at least she could be a real help to her husband—understand his troubles better—help him at times."

"Yes," he agreed, "that's different. For a girl to take a job for a while, and learn a few things—while she's still young——"

Madge caught her breath. "I see," she thought, "but I'm *not* young!" Aloud she said, decisively, "Well, I'm glad I took a job—and I mean to keep right on with it, too!"

"You mean you'll be going back?" he asked, as though that were taken for granted.

"Oh, yes—to-morrow," she replied.

The depression on his face increased.

"I hoped you'd be stayin' on a while."

"No, I think I'd better go. So you can come back

here to-morrow, you see, and you two men can be together."

"I reckon that won't be long," he replied.

As he talked on, she could feel his thoughts center more and more upon his coming loneliness. And she let them. In a voice again low and sympathetic, every question that she asked made more clear the picture of a dreary bachelor life.

Presently he rose to leave.

"May I come for supper to-night?" he asked.

"Why yes, if you like. I'd be pleased to have you," she said, in a stilted little tone.

When he had gone, she stood there with a look of fast deepening dismay, as she tried to remember all she had said.

"You little fool!" she exclaimed to herself, flushed and angry. "For Heaven's sake let's come to our senses! It's about time all this queerness stopped! What I want is to get right back to what I know —to where I belong!"

CHAPTER X

I

SHE looked in for a moment on Gordon but found that he was still asleep. Then she went into her own room and began getting her things together. There was no need of packing yet, but she wanted something to do. She did not get very far, however, for in the top bureau drawer she found a letter from her friend, Amanda Berry. It had come the day before. She had not stopped to read it then; but she sat down and read it now—quickly at first, and then very slowly a second time. And as she read, her expression changed.

"That's funny. I never stopped to ask what she must be thinking of all this."

But she guessed now, reading between the lines, for she knew her friend so well. The letter was careful, to a degree. Obviously Amanda had jumped to the conclusion that Gordon would die, and that with all his money Madge would rapidly drift away.

"She knew I'd never stay at home. She knew I'd

offer to take her along, but she had already made up her mind that she would not accept it." Amanda was so fearfully proud and independent. More and more Madge realized how blue and lonely her friend must have been. And the knowledge brought a pleasant glow. Here at last was somebody who wanted her, and the effect was like a tonic. All day Madge had felt herself slowly, slowly slumping back to what she had been a week before; and she had not fought against it. It had not felt real enough to fight. Still in a dream, she had drifted on. But her talk with Joe had sent the dream flying up into thin air, and now Amanda's letter brought her sharply back to earth. She woke up and faced the situation with clear and interested eyes.

"Now how about Amanda and me? Gordon didn't die, thank God, and I'm not an heiress," she thought. "But I've had the shake up I needed, and I'm going to stop this holding back!"

Into her mind flashed memories of how, repeatedly in the last year, Amanda had brought up the plan for spending a year or so abroad, working for Hoover. But Madge had held back. In vain her friend had warned her of the rut they were getting into, and from which they would soon be too old to escape. Though again and again her imagination

had been stirred by the pictures of the roving life they might lead in various countries over seas, in quaint old towns and villages; of the service they might render, the adventures they might find—still some obdurate, cautious common sense within herself had kept making objections. The whole idea was too strange and wild—impossible! Amanda had replied by action. Having done splendid work herself in the food campaign during the war, she had applied to the "A. R. A.," had entered their names on the waiting list, and by repeated letters had done all she could to keep the way open. Good for Amanda! Madge made up her mind that now she would help, and between them they would scheme and contrive until they were given the chance to go.

"We'll get off just as soon as we can!" she decided. "When I get home to-morrow, I'll tell her and we'll start right in!"

She could see already in fancy the sudden joy on the face of her room-mate, as she cried, "Three cheers for our little Madge!" Then they would plan excitedly, talking on late into the night; and when at last they went to bed, into her room her friend would come and sit down and begin to ask her about this visit to New York. And so the talk would begin again. With eager questions, long re-

plies, over it all from start to finish they would go. What a grim, amazing time! Up and up to millions —visions—then plump down again to earth! "All right, Little One, never you mind!" she could hear the deep voice of her huge friend. "Money isn't the only way of breaking loose from Halesburg. Just watch us now!" And back they would come to their scheming. In dreams, again they would soar away over the seas. At last, as Amanda rose to go, "Hold on! Look here!" she would exclaim, in tragic fashion. "We've completely forgotten to decide what we'll do with the *rest* of our lives—when we get back home from Europe!"

"Amanda Berry, you go to bed!"

But Madge let herself think of that now. Where would they go when they got back? Halesburg? No. New York? Perhaps. "Or San Francisco—or Hindustan or Cochin-China!" she decided recklessly. "The main thing is, we'll be out of our ruts, and we'll never get back in 'em again!" Just for an instant, in a flash, a conception came to her of a whole nation, a whole world, seething with change and changing lives from one end to the other—people alone or in little groups or in prodigious masses, rapidly and unconsciously dropping behind them old ideas, beliefs and standards, adventuring on into strange

new dreams of living. "And we've been left out of it all," she thought, "just left on a shelf—betwixt and between—in a flat up over a furniture store. And don't forget those varnished stairs!" How she had detested them—shiny, sticky, cheap and new! Home? Their home had been a joke!

"But, on the other hand," she thought, "thank God, I didn't marry a man, and get anchored down for life!"

2

When Leonora, a little later, came back from the theatre, she found a different woman here. But at first she did not notice it. Her play had gone well that afternoon, and she knew that her lover was safe; and engrossed in her own happiness, she went in to sit by his bed.

"I can only be here an hour or so," she said to Madge. "On matinée days I usually stay at the theatre and rest and have some supper there—but to-night I don't seem to want any rest!" And she added, with a little laugh, "I just couldn't keep away!"

"You go right in to him," said Madge, "and when supper is ready I'll let you know."

Old Abe was out for the afternoon, so she pre-

pared a light supper herself, and later sat with Leonora while the girl ate rapidly.

"Is the play still picking up?" asked Madge.

"Yes, it took a jump to-day. We played to over a thousand dollars—nice little chinky iron men. It's Thanksgiving Day, of course, and the business will fall off again. Still, we're pretty sure of it now."

"I'm glad," said Madge. "You've certainly worked for it hard enough."

"Yes." Over a large cup of coffee, Leonora smiled at her and said, "That's something you learned about me last night."

"I did——" with a quick, responsive smile. "I never thought of actresses before as working women." Madge hesitated, then went on: "But I wonder if you've ever learned what a lot of other things there are for women to work at, in these days."

"I suppose so," Leonora said. But watching the absent-minded look which came in her eyes, Madge reflected, "How utterly wrapped up in themselves these stage people are!" Aloud she inquired, cheerfully,

"Have you made any plans about getting married?"

"No."

Madge grew curious.

"Will you be married in church?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't believe so——"

"Where, then? Have you any home or relatives here?"

"No, thank God!" With a sharp little smile. "No, I live in a hotel. And I guess we'll just go to the City Hall, or wherever it is—and get married, that's all—tell the taxi-man to wait outside."

"I see," said Madge, and there was a pause. "Tell me. Where did *you* come from?" she asked, with a curious gleam in her eyes.

"From Paris."

"Wha-at?"

Leonora laughed.

"Paris, Delaware," she said. "It was a rotten little town. Poor? They *don't make* such poverty now as I was up against when I was small. And strict? My God. We were Catholics."

The interest in Madge's face grew brighter, as she inquired,

"Don't you ever get the feeling of living somehow betwixt and between?"

A puzzled look. "How do you mean?"

"Why, take my case." And in a few words Madge rapidly drew the picture—of the lovely old frame

house by the river, where she was born, and then of Hale and Pritchett's store and the cheap flat with the varnished stairs, and the swiftly changing life in her town. "And I'll bet," she ended, "that there are millions of us like that."

Leonora looked a little blank.

"Yes, I suppose there are," she said. "I'd never stopped to think of it, though. In my own case I've changed so fast I haven't had time for a single think! A week ago, I could have sworn that I would never give up the stage. I may now. In a few years more——"

"When Gordon is worth millions," put in Madge, with a quick smile.

"Exactly," Leonora said.

"And meanwhile you'll come here to live."

"I guess so——"

"After the taxi-man has brought you up from City Hall."

"That's it," said Leonora, smiling. "But look—have you thought over what I said this morning? Don't you want to stay with us?"

"No," said Madge, "I've plans of my own."

And she noted with satisfaction Leonora's blank surprise, as she told of her plan for going abroad. For several minutes she talked on, with her com-

panion throwing in friendly questions from time to time. Then the girl's thoughts came back to herself.

"I wish Gordy and I could go," she sighed. "But I guess it's just work for months ahead. . . . Hello, it's nearly seven o'clock. I must be off to the theatre soon."

She went back into Gordon's room for a while, then came out and got ready to leave.

At the door in the hall, she took Madge's hand.

"Good luck," she said, "and thanks again, a thousand times, for what you did for us last night! I don't suppose I'll see you again——"

"No, I leave to-morrow early."

"Well, when you're ready to start abroad, come down here a few days ahead—and let's have a spree—and another think!"

"All right, I'll do it! Good-bye and good luck!"

For a time Madge sat alone again, now and then smiling to herself.

"I wonder if we'll go to Russia?" she asked. Suddenly the smile died out. "Oh, how I'd like to just pitch in and work my fingers off," she thought, "ladling 'balanced rations' into the stomachs of little boys!"

3

Then Joe Evans came to supper.

"Abe is out," she told him, "and we'll have to get supper ourselves. Do you mind?"

"No—not at all," he answered.

Joe was looking very glum. "He's thinking of his future life," she thought, with satisfaction. But then with a gleam of compassion, "He's blue, poor boy, and he needs cheering up." In the kitchen she exerted herself to change his mood. She had always been an excellent cook; and now as she ordered him about, and the appetizing odors of bacon, eggs and coffee rose, he began to grow visibly hungry; and when they sat down to supper, he looked at Madge with different eyes.

"Are you still going back to-morrow?" he asked.

"Yes——"

"Why don't you try New York for a while?"

"I may, some day," she answered, "but I'm planning now to go abroad."

"What? You?"

"Exactly. Me."

And she began calmly to outline her plan. As she talked, her animation increased, for glancing now and then at his face she read his surprise and interest. Madge broke off with a little laugh.

"Now be honest," she said, "and confess. You thought me the kind of girl—woman, I mean—who was fixed for life. You thought I would go right back to my corner, didn't you? And that," she went on, "is exactly what I would have done, if it hadn't been such a tremendous shake up that I've had this week. We've both had it, you and I—and I propose to make mine count—and I advise you to do the same. We've both been jerked right out of our lives—and it's just as though a great big voice from up in the sky were saying to us quietly, 'Look around you. Start again.' . . . Well, I mean to do it!"

As Joe listened to all this, the astonishment was still in his eyes.

"But," he said, "you're not going to stay abroad all your life——"

"No, I don't suppose I shall. We may come right here to New York, for all I know," was her brisk reply. "If we do, Amanda and I will look around us and get jobs and then rent a little flat. But it won't have any varnished stairs! Shiny, sticky, smelly things——"

"May I come and see you?" he put in.

"Oh, yes, and we'll ask you to supper at times—when we're feeling good and prosperous. And you

can take me once in a while to the opera, if you care to. Unless," she added quickly, "you've gone out to your ranch by then."

"Oh, I reckon I won't be going for a few years yet," he said.

"Then," she answered cheerfully, "we may get here before you leave. On the other hand, Amanda and I may decide we don't want to come home at all. We may decide to settle down in Moscow or in Petrograd."

"And be regular Bolsheviks!" said Joe.

"We may," was her prompt rejoinder. "I can't say I feel much like it now—but you never can tell what you'll be, these days. If you try to look a year ahead——"

"Look here," said Joe, earnestly, "I think you're making a big mistake to go running 'way over to Russia—after a lot of Bolsheviks. Fine thing to feed the kids, of course—but there are kids enough, God knows, right here in New York, who are dying like flies—jest for the lack of a little help from a woman like you."

"That's so," she answered gravely. "And while I'm gone, if I were you I'd take a boy's club—do your bit. It would help to fill your evenings."

His reply to that was a kind of a snort.

"But speaking of evenings," she went on, with a sudden glance at the clock. She was just on the point of asking, "What are we going to do to-night, to celebrate Gordon's recovery?" But her glance fell on the nurse, Miss Field, who had appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Cable would like to see you now," said the nurse to Joe. "He's awake again."

"All right," said Joe, reluctantly rising. "You'll be here this evening, I suppose," he added, to Madge, with a new intension in his tone.

"Oh, yes. I have my packing to do."

But while she was attending to that, in her room, which had been Joe's, once more her eye was caught by the small envelope on his desk. Two tickets to the opera! She remembered they were for to-night! For a moment, growing a little excited, she wondered whether to ask him to take her.

"No," she thought. "Gordon wants him here. . . . Besides," she added, suddenly, "I think I'd rather go alone!" She looked at the clock. It was nearly nine. "Never mind—it lasts for ages—and I've always been dying to hear *Louise!*" A little later she was deciding whether or not to change her clothes. "No, I haven't anything worth putting on. And besides, what difference does it make?"

Breathlessly she tidied her hair and put on her hat and jacket. Then she slipped quickly out of the room. In the hall she came upon Miss Field.

"I don't want to disturb them now," she said. "Will you say good-bye for me to Mr. Evans?"

"Oh—are you going home to-night?"

"No," said Madge, serenely. "I'm going to the opera."

4

As she got into a taxi and it rattled on its way, again she thought about her clothes, but only for an instant.

"Oh, who cares? I'm going! I won't meet a soul I know—and nobody will even be aware of my existence!"

At first, it seemed that she was right. For the opera had already begun, her orchestra seat was rather far back on a side aisle, so she slipped right in; and almost at once she began to feel the magic of the music. "They're singing in French!" She was glad of that, for she could catch quite a few of the words; and for a time she just drank in the voices and the setting. Then the music, and the lines of the Paris working girl hungry for life, began to pour into Madge a feeling of fresh deep restlessness. In

a flash she saw her friend and herself on an ocean liner bound for France; and blurred, exciting pictures rose before her in the glamorous dark.

The music ceased, and the spell was broken. She came to herself, and all at once she felt conspicuous, ill at ease. The lights were up, and she grew aware of the surprised inquisitive glances of several women close about. But then they forgot her, absorbed in themselves or in watching the boxes above.

"So that is the Golden Horseshoe!" Madge told herself, relaxing; and her look, intent and curious, went up to the gleaming gowns and the smiling faces there. Every few moments her glance was caught by some woman or girl more animated than the rest. Gay and vivacious, pompous and fat, clever, stupid, happy, cross—there they were, the Notorious Rich! And she wished she had an opera glass! Her alert, observant eyes went on and on, and she found herself guessing where they had come from and how long they had been rich. Millions? Billions! It was here! The peak of the scramble! Where had they started? How many others were on their way, scrambling busily day and night up the national Dollar Hill to find places at the top! And how many more had it in them, in dreams!

"A box at the opera! Yes," she confessed, "I was thinking of one for myself, only two short days ago!" She recalled that drive on the Avenue; and, the vistas, warm and dazzling, began to open once again. With a smile she thought, "I had *all that* inside of me—and all the time Gordon hadn't a cent! I don't care—I'm glad it happened! Think what I was a week ago! And in a month I may be on a liner—bound for Russia! I wonder if we can't arrange to get a few days in Paris first!"

Suddenly the memory of her last talk with Evans broke in. "When I get back home? Oh, wait and see! I tell you I won't miss this trip for any man that breathes!" she decided. And feeling suddenly very gay, she let her fancy bear her on; again she heard the rush of waters, felt the powerful pulse of the engines as the big liner in the dark went rushing eastward over the sea.

The lights in the great house of gold grew slowly dim, the music came streaming through the dark, the giant curtains moved softly back—and Madge drew in her breath with a gasp. From the heights of Montmartre, with the girl on the stage, she looked far down on Paris sparkling in the night. . . . And now the girl was singing.

When another intermission came, in the seats close by again and again some hasty glance would be caught and held by the picture she made, this prim little woman of thirty-two, in her brown street suit, sitting alone, with a smile on her face and a curiously intent expression in her blue-grey motionless eyes. But she did not heed their glances now; for thinking again of the last days and the amazing warmth of dreams which had come surging out of herself, she had a sharp and staggering sense of the presence of this secret glow in millions of other human breasts. The pictures came—of Uncle Phil in his doctor's buggy long ago, dreaming of his hospital; of Aunt Abby in her kitchen, dreaming of homes for her three girls; of Ray in his noisy small garage, planning his great factory; of herself in Hale and Pritchett's store, visioning her great career. And so it was all over the land. From the people rich and prosperous about her in the house of gold, her mind flashed off and far away to other crowds, at picture shows, and to homes in cities and small towns. And she pictured a great invisible spirit rushing over the earth that night, and to each one of them, old and young, in every crowd, in every home, whispering,

"Here's a million dollars! In a few hours it may be yours! Tell me what you'll do with it!"

And Madge's smile grew fixed and strange—for as with an electric shock she felt the secret fire rise in every mother's son of them!

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